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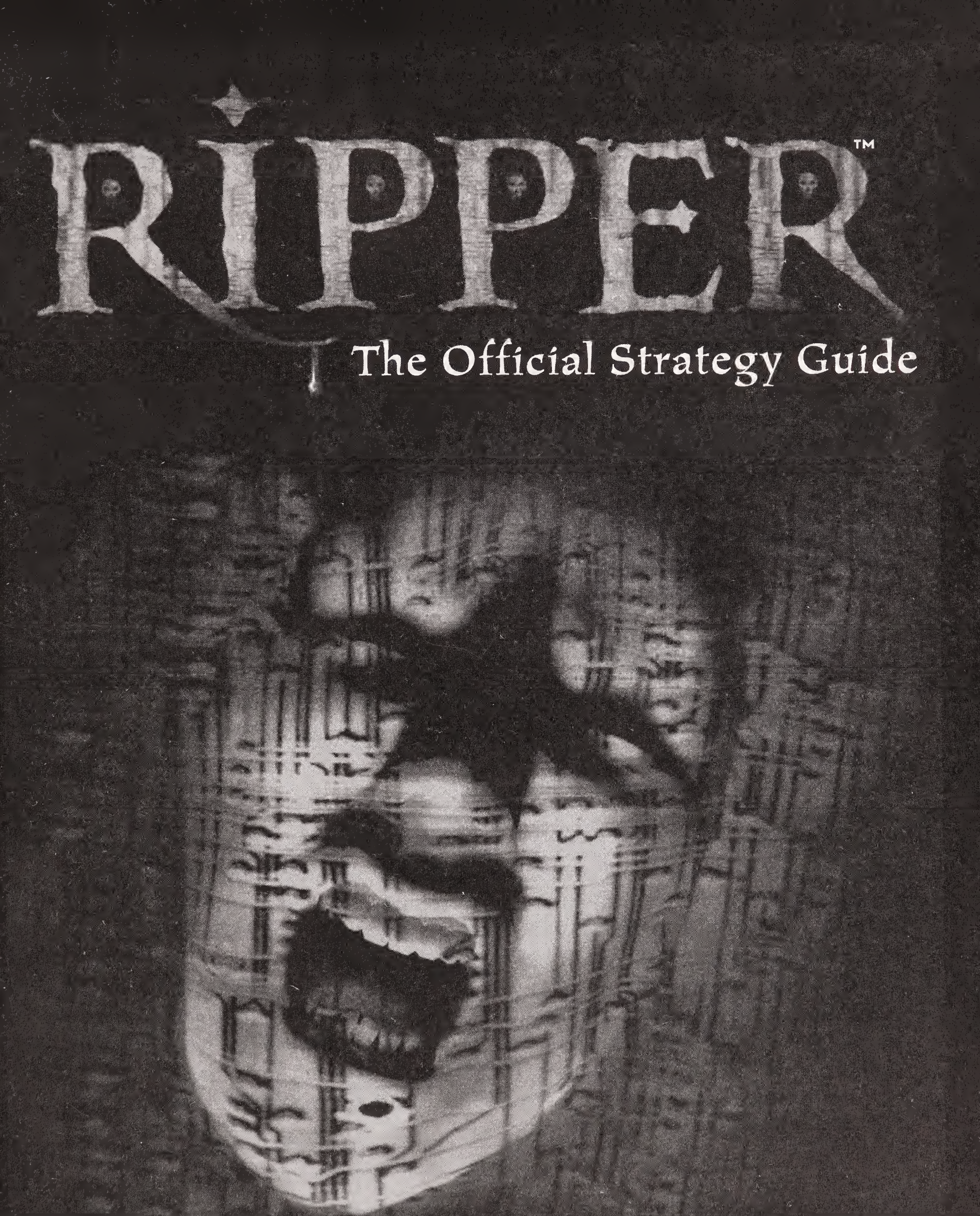

Dennis Johnson

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Contents

Introduction vii

PROLOGUE 1

Chapter 1 Cold Karl, Cold Cop, Cold Body.....5

Chapter 2 What Happens When You Try To Scoop An Ace Reporter 13

PART ONE

ACT ONE

Chapter 3 At Least She's Not Dead 23

Chapter 4 Where The Cops Are When You Need Them 29

Chapter 5 I Visit A Brain Surgeon And She Doesn't Want Me To Stay.....33

Chapter 6 The Happy Coroner.....43

Chapter 7 All Roads Lead To Hoboken.....49

Chapter 8 Dumpster Diving At The Library.....53

Chapter 9 I Play With Rocks.....59

Chapter 10 Virtual Shoot-Out 63

Chapter 11 I Get Tough With A Guy In A Wheelchair, Then A Real Old Guy 67

Chapter 12 Angel With A Knife.....81

Chapter 13 Menage A Trois 91

ACT TWO

Chapter 14 Ulterior Motive Gridlock 97

Chapter 15 Finally: I Can Read A Woman's Mind.....105

Chapter 16 The Fat Man Vanishes.....113

Chapter 17 I Read My Girlfriend's Diary And Criticize Her Writing.....115

Chapter 18 It Pays To Crack Open A Book Every Now And Then 125

Chapter 19 Bug On The Wall 131

Chapter 20 A Not-So-Sentimental Education.....137

Chapter 21 A Killer Dancer.....143

Chapter 22 All Webbed Up And No Place To Go 149
Chapter 23 Murder At The OK Corral 155
Chapter 24 Close But No Cigar 161
Chapter 25 Killer Workout 167
Chapter 26 Too Much Monkey Business 175
Chapter 27 Cheap Puzzle, Murderous Dilemma 183
Chapter 28 Sharp Blade, Dull Memory 191
Chapter 29 Copper Chopper vs Pen-Head Pinhead 195
Chapter 30 Well Of Desire 199
Chapter 31 Hands Down, My Worst Dining Experience Ever 203

ACT THREE

Chapter 32 I Get The Magnotta Kicked Out Of Me 211
Chapter 33 Decking Without A Helmet 215
Chapter 34 I Talk To A Dead Guy, He's Pretty Helpful 225
Chapter 35 They Say It's Bliss 231
Chapter 36 Why I Never Liked Coders 237
Chapter 37 Artist's Suck, Too 243
Chapter 38 I Take Rejection Badly 247
Chapter 39 Hot-Blooded Woman, Cold-Blooded Killer? 253
Chapter 40 Vendetta Regatta 259
Chapter 41 I Round Up The Unusual Suspects 265
Chapter 42 I Break Up With My Girlfriend And Kill Somebody 271
Chapter 43 A.K.A Reality 278

PART TWO

Walkthrough 280

Appendix 303

Introduction

WHEN F.J. Lennon, John Antinori and I started writing and designing *Ripper* a little over a year ago, we had no idea we were creating more that just a game about a monster—we were creating a monster game. *Ripper* turned out to be much bigger and more complex than your average game, with numerous subplots and multiple scenarios, not to mention four different endings. It's so complex, in fact, that it's hard to describe. As it turned out, it took a whole book to do it.

Ergo, *Ripper: The Official Strategy Guide*. What follows is an attempt to tell you not only how to play the game, but how to enrich the experience. Part One is the "soft-clue" section, a telling of the story replete with hints, some out-right answers to puzzles, some clues as to how to win the combats, and a general strategy for how to progress through the game. What's more, while the soft-clue section takes the form of a novel, and therefore only has one ending, it's still got lots of clues in it as to how the other suspects might be discovered to be guilty. Part Two, on the other hand, is a stream-lined walkthrough, offering the fastest way to successfully complete the game. It includes all passwords, the answers to all the puzzles, how to win at combats, and a detailing of the questions you should ask during each interaction and what you should learn from them. It also tells you the best way to sequence locations, and includes an appendix of cheat codes—words you can type during some puzzles or combats that will make you automatically win.

The two sections of the book are meant to suggest that there's more than one way to play the game. You may notice, for example, that in some places the soft-clue section varies

from the walkthrough: Some clues are different, and it is suggested that you travel to some locations in a different order. Both versions are correct, but the soft-clue suggestions are meant to offer a fuller, more interesting way to savor the story and successfully navigate your way to the end of the game. It takes advantage of some interactions that you don't necessarily need to go through in order win, some dialogue that was cut or trimmed from the game, and alternative clues that only the game's designers and coders know about; consider it a sort of "Director's Cut" version of *Ripper*. The walkthrough section, however, offers more straightforward answers to solving puzzles and winning combats, and comprises the fastest, most direct way to play the game.

Either way, using this book should contribute greatly to your enjoyment of the game, and its replayability. And I was glad for the opportunity to put back in some of the lines, atmospherics, scenes, and explanations that were, by necessity, cut from our original design. I hope it enhances your experience of the game, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to tell you the story again in another medium.

DJ
March 1996

PROLOGUE

IN THE BEGINNING

THERE'S jaded, and then there's jaded. Just like there's dead, and then there's dead. Or murdered, and *murdered*. I could go on. I have to, as a matter of fact, no matter how jaded I am. Because if I don't, I'll be dead. Worse—I'll be *murdered*.

That's what the Ripper told me, anyway. "You're the only one I'll talk to," he told me, "and if you don't keep printing what I say, then I'll be the last one you talk to." There was plenty of evidence on hand—in plastic bags down in the morgue cooler, smaller bits floating nearby in beakers of blood-hued saline solution—to tell me he wasn't fooling. "You are the writer of words," he said. "I am the taker of souls." So far, he'd been as good as his word.

But to make matters worse, he wasn't the only one I was nervous about. Some of the characters I had to deal with reporting the story were pretty skanky, too. Suspected murderers themselves. Suspected the way Al Capone, say, was suspected of having a temper.

Even the cops were scary—it didn't take long, for instance, before I thought Magnotta, the grizzled detective spearheading the investigation, was going to murder me, too, or at least set me up to take the fall for the worst serial murders in Manhattan's history. In fact, having researched serial murders as part of reporting the story, I think it's safe to say that the current, ongoing killings were the worst in the history of murder, period.

Worse even than those of the original Jack the Ripper. Not in quantity, maybe, but in, well, quality.

It had started as a routine story; gruesome, maybe, but routine. That was part of what was making me jaded. I'd been covering crime scenes for the *Virtual Herald* for nearly a decade at that point, and I'd seen enough. Seen enough people brutalized by lovers, burglars, random psychopaths. Seen enough of our cold-blooded police force, too. Bounty hunters is what they were. Ever since the Metro Force had been reorganized twenty years before in yet another attempt to control crime, bounty hunters is what they actually were, legally. Crime had become so rampant in New York that officials decided to fight fire with fire—to turn the cops loose and pay them by the booking. It didn't matter what condition the captured were in—catch a burglar, get a bounty. Catch a killer, get a big bounty. Catch a serial killer, retire a rich man.

I was doing all right off it myself, I have to admit. I was on the front page all the time now, getting my pick of assignments. Had been for a while. Some of the stories went on in the strange way that stories do, occasionally—the way tales of dead people sometimes achieve their own lives in the weird society of America, 2040. People write books about particular cases, make movies about them. Every now and then I'd go on a talk show or be a source for some cheesy Hollywood scripter. I'd gotten to the point where I'd demand a bundle in return for this sort of stuff, and I'd get it, every time.

But I was long past the point where I was thinking I ought to quit and write the great American novel. I'd already told my editor, Ben Dodds, that this was it. "It's all over when I wrap this one up," I told him. "No more." He'd protested, as I'd known he would, and I let him take me out to the White Horse and get me drunk while he tried to talk me out of it. But as much as I liked

Ben, and as much as I like free whiskey, I held firm, and eventually he saw the writing on the wall and appointed a hot young reporter to be my apprentice. I was supposed to groom her to take my place. Starting with the Ripper case. Lucky her.

At the time, having forced Ben's hand, I felt a tinge of uncertainty, of regret, although I'd demanded the situation. But the feeling passed. It was nice having a gofer, somebody to do the boring research and the scut work. And, as I say, she was hot. But I'll get to that.

The point is that I was thirty-six and had a bank account and a decent apartment for once, and was in a position to move on to something else, something better than writing about killing. I was beat, whipped, tired, and brimming with the kind of world-weary cynicism that comes with seeing precisely how pitifully sick humans can be, but now there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Who knew that light would turn out to be an oncoming train?

Chapter 1

COLD KARL, COLD COP, COLD BODY

So there I was, climbing the steps in yet another brownstone, my feet feeling like cement blocks. I'd known as soon as the phone jarred me awake in the middle of the night what awaited me. I'd lingered before answering and run my hand along Catherine's face. She'd had a restless night, up and down at her computer, before finally succumbing to sleep. I fought the urge to check her breathing; lately, I suspected death everywhere. I sighed and picked up the phone. It was Ben.

A woman in the West Village this time, he told me. The third victim. "Haul ass," he said. "The body's getting cold, and that scumbag will probably be trying to reach you here in the newsroom before daybreak."

But it was hard to hurry, as if I were eager, out into the night. I knew what that crime scene was going to look like. I knew I'd probably need to stop off for a bracer after seeing it—a bracer, say, that came in a shot glass the size of an oil drum. And so what if I was late getting to the newsroom afterwards? Ripper would try to contact me again and again until he got through. I was the only one he'd write to. And then I would run his vile letter, just like I'd run the others, on the front page of *The Herald.* Because it was news. I would let the world know: The Ripper had struck again.

So by the time I got to that long wooden staircase I felt as

though I had the weight of the world on my shoulders. Two cops leaving the scene trooped past me, leather creaking. "Hope you haven't eaten yet, Quinlan," one of them cracked. I think they call this morbid humor.

Something that Magnotta had in spades—he was on me, as usual, as soon as I opened the door to the crime scene, barking at me not to do any souvenir hunting. Right, I thought. As if, at any of the hundreds of murder scenes I'd covered, I'd ever taken something. As if I liked to bring back a little something for the kids: My parents went to lower Manhattan and all I got was this lousy blood-soaked T-shirt.

But he stalked off to yell at somebody else and left me, albeit momentarily, to my own devices. This was my window of opportunity. I faced the same investigative choices I always faced at a crime scene: how to proceed, who to talk to, what to look at. Would I see something the cops missed? You'd be surprised how often this actually happens. The cops are human, after all. Some of them, anyway.

I decided to talk to Karl Stasiak, the forensics photographer, first. If anyone was going to have anything for me, it was either him or Magnotta. Those were my choices, and it didn't really make any difference which one I spoke to first; I just decided to save the worst for last in this instance. It would give me some time to steel myself to the horror of the room. And Stasiak, unlike Magnotta, was a regular guy doing a job. Even though they called Stasiak "Cold Karl," I knew he'd be as shaken as I was by it all, so I wouldn't have to immediately be on my mark. I was gulping for air as it was. Dealing with Magnotta first would have been like surfacing too fast, like a serious case of the bends.

Chapter 1

I found Cold Karl bent over the body, taking close-ups.

Stasiak, it turned out, was trying to put up his cold front, and he was having slightly more success than the last time I'd seen him. This was the third Ripper victim he'd had to deal with, after all, so maybe he was finally working up an immunity. He still pointed out that he'd been doing this for twenty-three years and had never seen anything as grisly, but after that he wasn't very talkative. Maybe that was because he wasn't finding anything new. At least the few facts I wheedled out of him confirmed that this was the work of the Ripper once again, without a doubt.

Mainly, though, Karl was as frustrated as ever about the murder weapon. As incredible as it seemed—what else could it be but a wicked-ass knife?—this was the thing that had all the cops banging their heads against the wall. It was the only thing that Karl waxed lugubrious about—he went on about the incredible swipe that had torn open the victim's torso, the impossible precision of the cut, the strength it would take to slice so deep, the sure hand necessary to make such a long, clean incision. Just the thought of it reduced Stasiak to a mumbling sour cuss; he just couldn't imagine what kind of blade could make such a decimating cut. Finally he gave up trying to even describe it and told me I should talk to Vic Farley, the morgue pathologist down at the Tribeca Metacognitive Center—better known as the Meta-Cog.

I listened to him and nodded mutely, taking notes even though I'd heard it all before at the site of the previous murder and at the one before that. I took it all down like I always do, because you never know. Some of these things could turn out to be clues. It works that way sometimes.

Actually, Stasiak did mention one thing that caught my attention: He said he thought Magnotta was acting weird. By this I took it he meant weirder than usual. Karl couldn't put his finger on anything in particular; he just said something seemed to be preoccupying the irritable detective. Then Karl told me to leave him alone. "Just go talk to Farley when you have a chance," he said. "He knows a lot more about the murder weapon than I do."

I told him I would and backed off. At the time, I didn't make much of the business about Magnotta's mood. Later, Karl's words would come back to haunt me.

Still trying to brace myself for direct contact with Magnotta, I nosed around the room a little bit, I was careful to skirt the gored body sprawled in a pool of blood on the floor. I gave it a glance, then tried my damnedest to look elsewhere.

Which is how I noticed the victim's computer, sitting on a small side-desk. It was still turned on, as if she'd been on-line when she was attacked. I cast a surreptitious glance at Magnotta. He had his back to me. He was mercilessly chewing out some uniformed underling. It looked as though it would take a while. I snuck a closer look at the computer monitor.

It took me a minute to focus on the wavering image; the screen was splattered with thick, congealing blood. Swallowing hard, I managed to look past it, though, and after a few minutes I understood what I was looking at: the gothic pillars of the virtual version of the New York Public Library. She must have been decked in when she was attacked.

I made a note of this. It was probably nothing—the woman went to the library. So what? Still, diligent fifth columnist that I am, I knew I'd have to pay a visit to the stacks myself and see what I could find. Maybe there'd be a librarian there who remembered this woman. Maybe I could find out what she'd been researching, what books she'd been using, that sort of thing.

Chapter 1

At this point, though, I didn't even know this woman's name. It was time to talk to Magnotta and get it over with.

He saw me coming and sneered. "Heard from your pen pal yet?"

I reminded him that the Ripper only wrote to me after the crime, then I started in with the questions. You only get a few minutes with Magnotta, and that's if you're lucky … if you want to call a few minutes with Mr. Happy luck.

"Her name was Renee Stein," he told me. "She was a 43-year-old book editor for Knopf."

I sighed. A book editor probably visited the library all the time, I thought. Which meant that I probably wouldn't find anything unusual or useful about her last visit. So much for that clue. I sighed again, because I knew I'd run it down later anyway. Like I say, some things you just have to do because, well, you never know.

Which is also why, in the meantime, I kept pumping Magnotta, and why I was just as careful to make note of his answers, even though at the time they seemed useless. The crime was identical to the others, he told me in his own inimitable fashion. It was especially identical in the fact that there were no clues—no signs of forced entry, no witnesses, no way to figure out why this woman had been murdered, or even *how*. Most of this I'd learned from Stasiak, but in this business, I've learned it's important to confirm as much as you can. You'd be surprised at who turns out to be a liar sometimes.

And there was another reason I was running Magnotta through the whole nine yards—sometimes it pays to ask someone what may seem like pointless questions, because you may find out more than just the answers. To the observant, it's like a little bonus.

What I found out was that Stasiak was right: Magnotta was acting strange.

The more I kept him talking, the more I noticed how tense he seemed, how testy—much worse than usual, which was saying a lot. It was always somewhat of a testosterone joust just trying to talk with the man. He personified hostility. But this time I thought I detected an air about him that was almost defensive, which wasn't like him at all. Magnotta was the most cocksure son of a bitch on the force. In fact, they had a saying about him down at the precinct house (one I always suspected Magnotta started himself): "He always gets his man." I thought the statement needed editing to be closer to the truth: "Magnotta always gets *a* man."

In any case, the stranger and more hostile he got, the more I began to wonder if he was holding something out on me. I kept plugging away at him, knowing that if he was keeping information from me, I'd never get him to admit it, but hoping something might slip out another way. His answers got nastier and nastier, and for once he seemed a bit rattled when I dished back the same attitude.

It took less time than usual before Magnotta declared my visiting hour over. But as he did so, he did one final thing that was really odd. He'd been holding a mug in his hand during our conversation. As our conversation drew to a close, I noticed that the mug was empty—it was something he'd picked up at the scene. A piece of evidence.

I couldn't help it. This was the guy who, ten minutes before, had told me not to touch anything, like I was a rookie who'd never visited a crime scene before.

"Gee, officer," I said. "Isn't that what you cops call a piece of evidence? You know, the sort of thing you're always hounding me not to touch?"

He gave me the kind of look that usually precedes a right hook to the temple. It's an expression I've noticed my sense of humor brings out in a lot of people. Then he dropped the mug to

Chapter 1

the floor, smashing it into pieces.

"Oops," he said. "Guess this case has me a little rattled." He sauntered off jauntily like the Magnotta of old, with a satisfied expression as if he were proud of his accomplishment. I knew he hadn't dropped that mug by accident.

I looked closer at the shards at my feet. I could tell it had some writing on it, like it was a souvenir of something, or carried some motto. It still looked like evidence to me.

I looked across the room at Magnotta. He was still grinning.

As much as I hate modern technology, there are times when I have to admit it comes in handy. I waited for Magnotta to look away, then reached into my inside pocket and pulled out my combination electronic notepad/telecommunicator/scanning device, better known as the WAC (short for wireless access computer). I used the scanning device to take a picture of the shattered remnants of the mug. From there, it was easy to go into the WAC's database, look at the scanned image, and manipulate the image of the shards in 3-D mode. I was able to reassemble a picture of the mug in one piece.

Once I did, however, I was even more confused. Now I could see that the mug had the word "Salisbury" emblazoned on it. This woman Stein had a mug with the name of her favorite steak on it? Had to be something else—the name of a person or place. But how to figure out its significance to Stein? Or, for that matter, to Magnotta—he'd smashed the thing, after all, as if he didn't want me to know about "Salisbury."

I'd just decided this was one of those bits of info I was going to have to save for later when my WAC rang. It was Catherine, calling from the newsroom.

She was breathless as her face suddenly appeared on the WAC's postage-stamp video screen. "Something's come up here," she said.

"What?" I asked.

"Can't tell you now," she said. "I'm in a hurry. Meet me here later—wait for me."

She's only been working at the paper for five or six months, and she was supposed to be my assistant on the story. Yet she acted like she was the primary, the seasoned veteran. I suppose this could have been partly my fault—I was the seasoned veteran, after all, who'd violated one of the primary laws of the journalistic jungle, the one about mixing love and work. But it was more than that. I was beginning to notice more and more that, although her demeanor was usually pretty cheerful, Catherine sometimes had a certain, strange stubbornness about her, a stubbornness that seemed based on resentment.

Anyway, I took a shot at asserting myself. "Hey, who's in charge of this story?" I asked her.

"After last night, I'd say I was," she chirped. She blew a kiss into the screen.

This is the kind of stubbornness I was talking about.

"Look," she went on, "I've got to run. If I'm not back at the newsroom in an hour, go to my apartment."

"You look," I started, but I was talking to dead air. The video screen had gone blank.

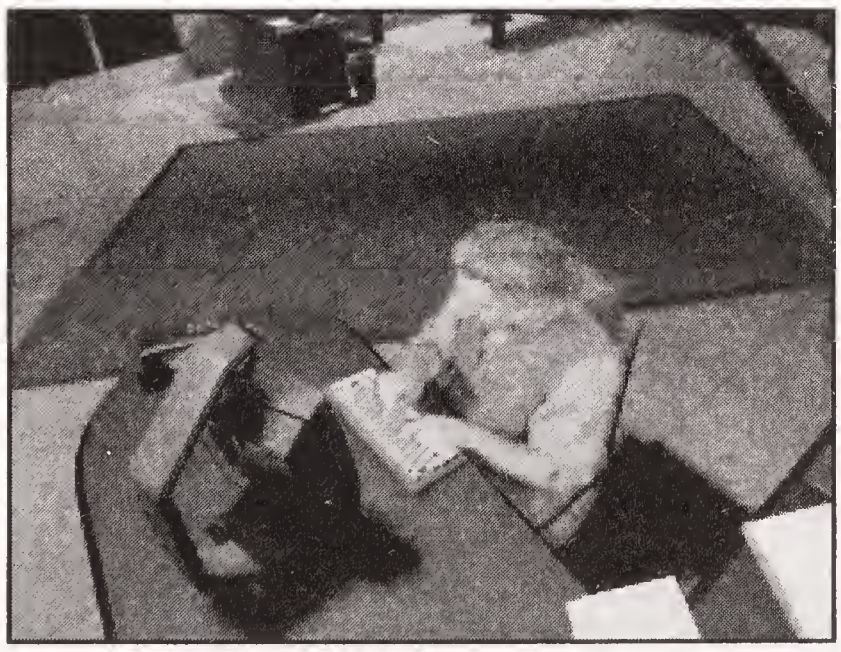
So I had an hour to kill. I decided to go back to the newsroom—not because Catherine had told me to, but to see if the Ripper had tried to contact me yet. And maybe I'd have a little talk with Ben about how to rein in my assistant. Rein her in as far as work was concerned, anyway.

Chapter 2

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU TRY TO SCOOP AN ACE REPORTER?

WITH a sigh, I headed off to my home away from home, the *Virtual Herald* newsroom. In fact, it was homier than my apartment. My apartment was just this place I stored a single bed, a second sport coat, and an answering machine that told callers to reach me at the newsroom. I hadn't opened the refrigerator in weeks, because that would entail dealing with whatever was in there, which was some kind of casserole project left by an old girlfriend who would no longer speak to me.

In any case, I often stayed at the newsroom for days on end, nodding off at my desk, waking up to find myself typing before I even realized where I was. Then I'd find out that—while still in a zone—I'd unconsciously signaled the intern/gofer-of-the-month, because there he was delivering a greasy bagel wrapped in wax paper and steaming coffee in a paper cup with funky pseudo-



classical figures printed on it. It was the trademark of every greasy spoon in New York; they'd been using that cup forever. And here it was, delivered as if by magic. As far as I was concerned, you couldn't beat that kind of service with a stick.

So this is what I anticipated as I looked out at the streaming lights of the city that never sleeps from the back of a cab that was being driven by someone who actually spoke English. It helped me shake off the bad case of the spooks I'd acquired from the crime scene, and to quit thinking about how bossy and inscrutable Catherine was being. In fact, I found myself slipping into more appealing thoughts of Catherine naked, instead of dressed in her reportorial trench coat, sneaking around trying to juke me out of my own story.

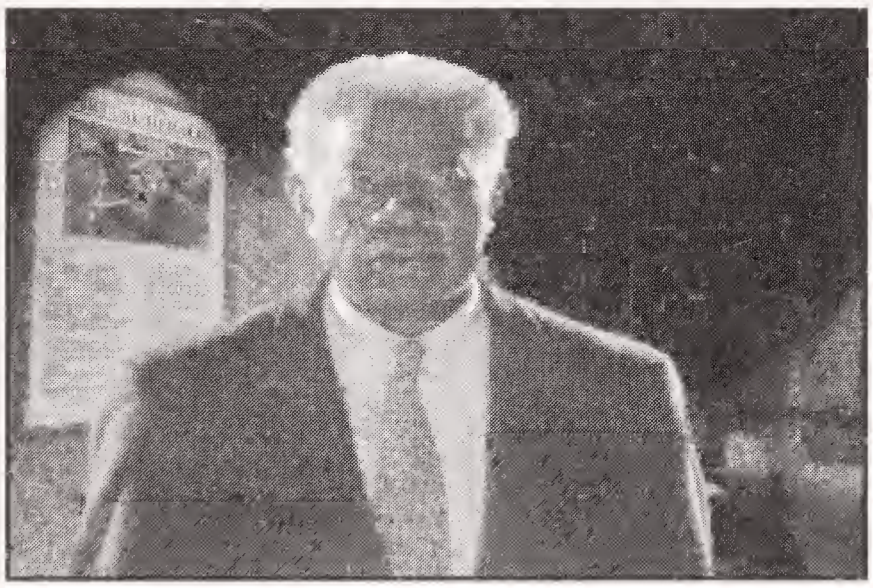
I guess I just figured that once back in the newsroom, things would return to the status quo. I would stride in there and the place would go quiet. I liked to think that the other reporters shut up when I came in because they were paying me silent obeisance—I was the weary but savvy veteran, the correspondent who'd done it all, seen it all, been there, done that, lost his shirt. Of course, the fact of the matter was that a lot of them were probably afraid that if they said anything I'd steal it. Which I would, if it was useful. Others simply didn't like me—reporters are a contentious lot. And still others were just jealous, under the impression that Ben gave me all the big stories because he favored me... which was probably true, too. But hey, I paid my dues.

Anyway, what I expected was to stride past my glowering colleagues, head for my desk, and wave to the new gofer. The bagel and coffee would show up. Perhaps I'd chase it with a shot from the flask stashed in the bottom drawer of my desk while I slowly settled into the permanent indentations my backside had worn in the cracked leather of my ancient desk chair. In other words, I'd reassume my role as Mr. Famous Crime Reporter. And

once I was royally ensconced, my new girlfriend would appear from the wings and come clean with whatever she was up to in a massive show of deference.

But what actually happened when I got there was that the real king of the newsroom, Ben Dodds, was waiting for me, and Catherine wasn't. She'd already left—in quite a hurry, according to Ben.

"And what I want to know," he said, "is what the hell she's up to. She was acting like she'd gotten some kind of break in the Ripper story, but you don't seem to know squat about it. I thought you were the primary on this one? You want to tell me what's going on?"



I felt like a kid who'd gotten home about three days late for curfew. It was as if Catherine expected me to cover for her, and I didn't even know what she was up to. In the meantime, she was making me look bad, like I was out of control of my own assistant, like I was slipping up, like *she* was covering for *me*. And why did I have the feeling she was about to scoop me on my own story? My mental image of Catherine naked suddenly changed: She sat, fully clothed, at my desk with a smug smile on her face. I'd turned into the guy who fetched the bagels.

Dodds just shook his head at me. I could tell he was thinking I'd dropped the ball. I tried to distract him by asking if the Ripper had attempted to contact me yet. It usually only took about an hour or two for the sadistic bastard's virtual letter to arrive, replete with his smarmy braggadocio and weird, ornate language. Ben shook his head in annoyance and said no, there'd been no

word from my "pen pal." That's what the Ripper called himself. He also called himself "the taker of souls." Ben stalked off.

I noticed some of the other deadbeats in the office slipping surreptitious glances my way. They seemed to be enjoying this. Quinlan finally blows it. Scooped by his own assistant. Maybe now the boss will see he's not all he's cracked up to be.

But I didn't care, because by then another thought had occurred to me: This was a dangerous story. No matter who Catherine was talking to, it was bound to be an unsavory type. Out there on the streets, at this hour of the night, an unarmed woman trying to get a lead on a serial killer—it just wasn't a good idea. I suddenly felt a little guilty about my suspicions of her. She could be in danger.

But there was nothing I could do except wait for her, while I also waited to hear from the Ripper. I looked at my watch and saw it wasn't moving. I shook it and the second hand started up again, but it was moving slowly.

I didn't have a lot of options, but I couldn't just sit there. I began to wonder—worry, actually—about what Catherine was up to. Maybe I could head her off, for her own good. I decided to check her desk to see if there was an indication of where she might be. Nonchalantly standing and launching into a fake stretch so the others wouldn't suspect the great reporter was suffering from a case of nerves, I strolled calm as a reflecting pool over to her desk.

And found absolutely nothing. Or at least, nothing that gave me any hint of her activities. There was her electronic Rolodex, her calculator. The only thing that really caught my eye was the little square of dust-free desktop where her WAC usually sat—it was probably at home, in the matching frame of dust on her desktop there. She hardly ever wore it, although I was always yelling at about it. It was hard to keep track of her when she

didn't carry it around, but she seemed to like traveling incommunicado. Or maybe she just liked breaking the rules—something I, of all people, couldn't get on her case about. In any event, the device was gone now, which meant either she was wearing it and not answering, or she'd left it at home. I shuffled through her papers and found nothing else.

I looked at the wall clock. I'd burned up all of two minutes. I glanced at Ben in his glass-walled office and saw him checking his watch. I wondered if he was worried about Catherine, too, or just anxious for the Ripper to contact me so he could set the front page. I meandered back to my desk, considering decking into the New York Public Library to see what I could find out about Renee Stein's visit there earlier that night. Maybe that would distract me. I really didn't think I'd find anything there, but it was one of those little tasks you have to do yet put off until it gradually becomes a guilty burden. I told myself to take care of it. I told myself that at least it would help me shake the hollow feeling I had, which was similar to the feeling of trying to sleep in a pitch: black room, but all you can do is lie there and listen to the kitchen faucet go drip, drip, drip off in the distance.

That was when I noticed the note she'd left for me on my desk.

"Jake," it read. "If anything happens to me, look to the crystals and let the light shine your way!"

Catherine and her bloody crystals. There was no doubt that the woman had a weird side. I used to think her fondness for crystals was cute, but in the back of my mind I knew that if we ever broke up I'd count this obsession as one of the reasons to consider her too weird for comfort.

But then my eyes focused on the beginning of the note—the part that said, "if anything happens to me … "

I snapped out of my mood with a start. She *was* up to something dangerous. Then I found out how dangerous: The

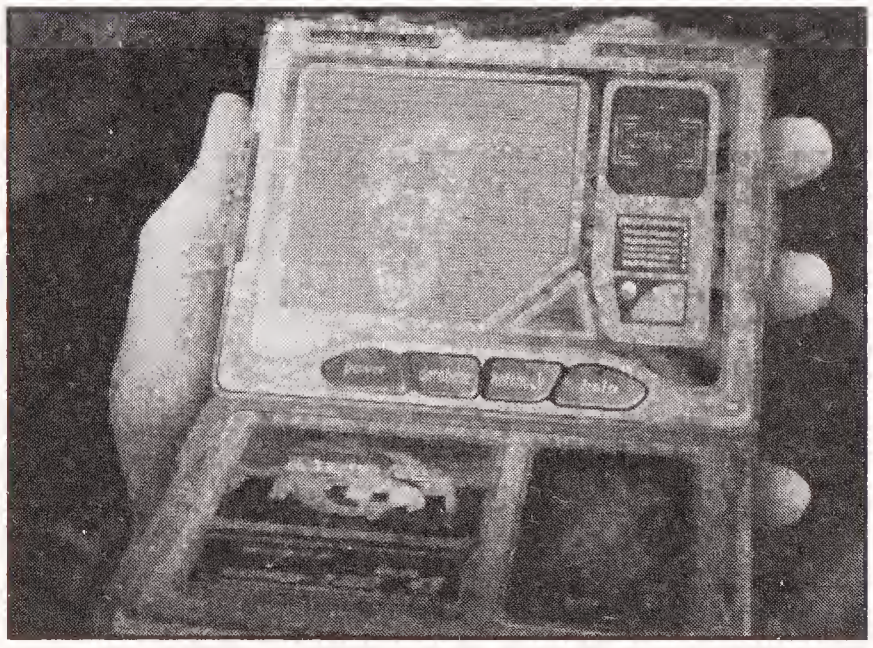
Ripper took that moment to speak.

My WAC signaled an incoming message and I answered, expecting Catherine. The madman's voice emanated forth instead, followed by his creepy image—a wavery rendering of a hellish green face that crackled with electronic distortion, as if it were deformed by the heat of its own evil.

"From hell, Boss," came the familiar opening.

I stared at the image, but the electronic mist made it, as ever, impossible to discern his features. You couldn't even tell if it was a man or a woman, although the electronic voice was that of a man. A very sick man.

"Have you seen my work this morning? None of you know how I'm doing it," he gloated, putting his finger right on the thing that was indeed driving everybody involved with the case absolutely crazy. It seemed as though he could read our minds. "Am I human?" he asked. "Am I the devil?"



I told myself that at least he usually kept it short, if not sweet. I waited for more of the usual psych-out tripe, like the time he asked me if I heard the humming in my head.

Instead, he said something that sent a bolt of lightning down my spine.

"You shouldn't let your girlfriend do your work for you," his crackling voice intoned. "She is close to me and I don't like it. She is my next job. She gets it today. The story's all yours."

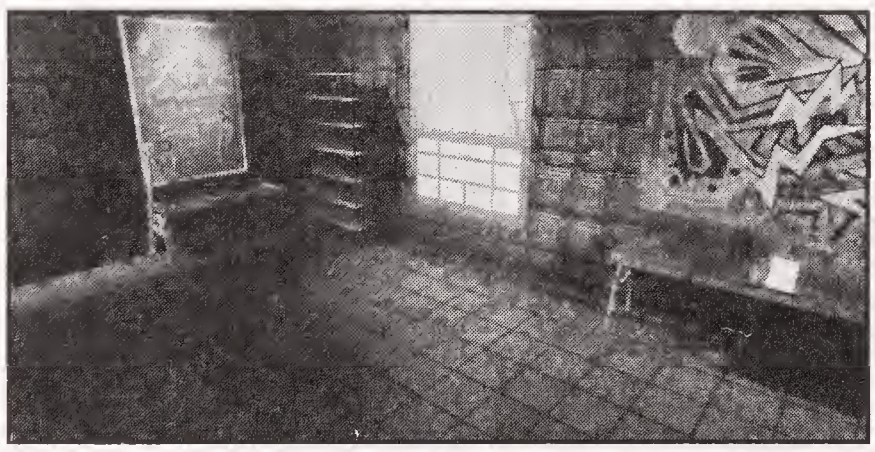
I cursed so vehemently that every head in the room looked up, but I was already halfway across the room. Somewhere in the background I heard Ben Dodds yelling after me. "Quinlan!" he

bellowed. "Quinlan! Where are you going? Quinlan? Quinlan!" But it was too late. I was already out the door.

Usually, it took me an hour to travel across town from the office to Catherine's apartment. This time I did it in twenty minutes, propelled by the fact that I was kicking myself in the ass for letting Catherine go out alone.

I was completely wired by the time I burst through her door, ready for anything. Except the still and empty space that confronted me.

I ran through the apartment, filling the place with sound and light as I called her name and threw on every light switch I could find. There was no sign of her. I ran through the apartment again, hoping to find her WAC, thinking it might have some notes in it, something that might indicate where she was, who she was meeting. But there was only the empty frame of dust on her desktop, matching the one on her desk in the newsroom. Her WAC was nowhere to be found. For once in her life, she had taken it with her.



Then I heard fumbling at the door.

It creaked open just as I whirled around. The light from the hallway cut an arc across the room as I saw the figure standing there, unmoving. Backlit by the bulb in the hall, I couldn't see her features, but it looked like Catherine … except there was something odd about her. I moved forward.

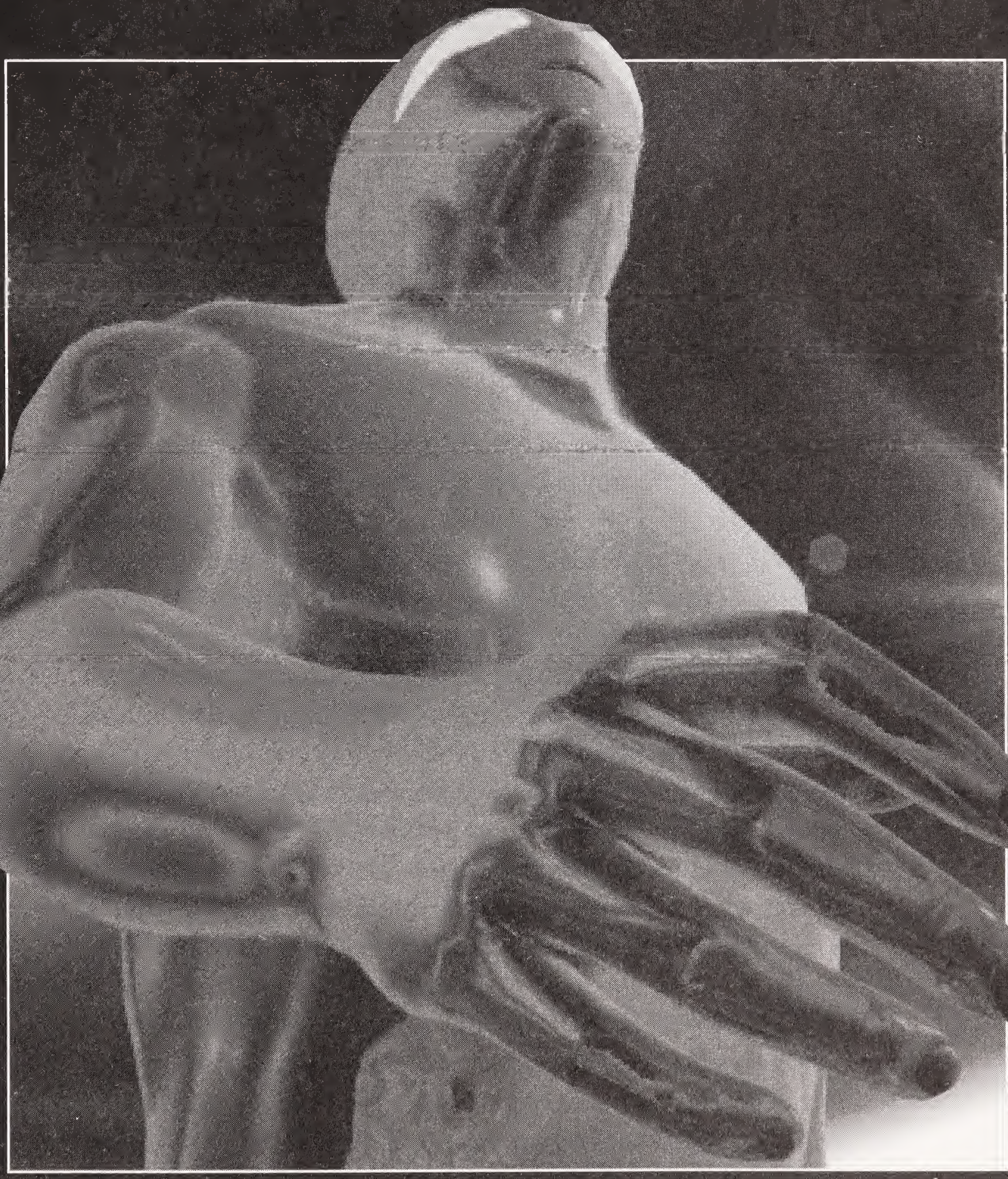
"Catherine?" I called. "What is it? What's wrong?" But she was mute. I was close enough now to see her face. She looked stricken, ashen. "Catherine?" I said in alarm.

Her mouth opened, then closed. Something in her throat

seemed to catch, then I saw her gulp as if in convulsion. Then she keeled forward. I caught her just in time, and we sank to the floor.

"Catherine!" I cried. I called her name out again, and then again, but it was too late. She was unconscious, or worse. There wasn't a mark on her, but she showed no signs of life at all as I held her and frantically searched her face, kneeling on the floor in the harsh cast of light from the hallway. I cradled her in my arms and called her name, all the while hearing the humming in my head, the humming the Ripper had told me about before, increasing till I felt like I was vibrating, increasing till all I could do was scream her name, increasing until it engulfed me.

PART ONE



Act One

Chapter 3

AT LEAST SHE'S NOT DEAD

My mind was a train wreck. I don't remember calling the cops, just the sensation of screaming into the phone. I don't remember the paramedics from the Meta-Cog showing up, or Magnotta and his storm troopers coming in and going over the place as if it were a crime scene; apparently, when they started scanning the place for prints I went nuts, screaming at Magnotta that Catherine hadn't been attacked there in the apartment, he should be out hunting the streets …

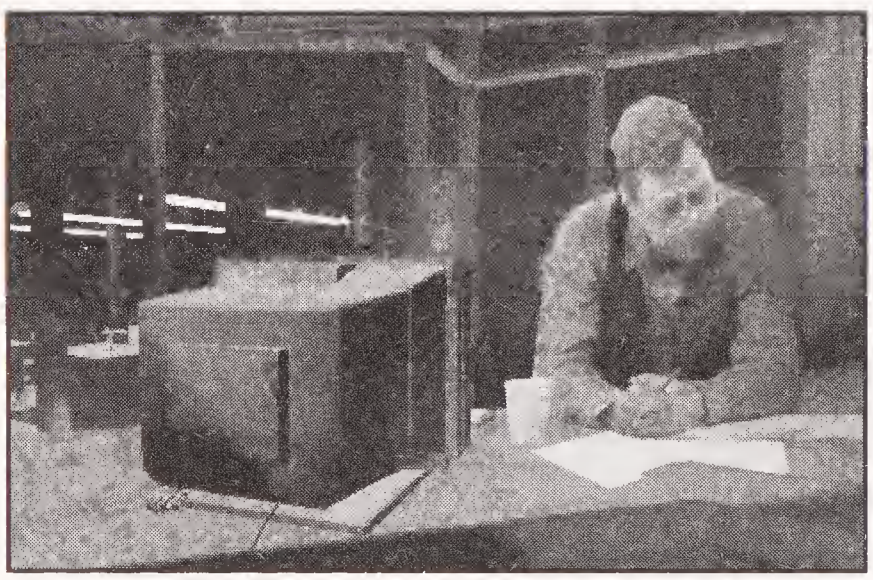
Like I say, I don't remember a bit of it, this was all recounted to me later—at the police station, which is where I found myself when my senses slowly began to return. I was standing in front of Lou Brannon, the desk sergeant, trying to orient myself. Too many questions were suddenly swirling in my mind—like, why hadn't the Ripper killed Catherine like the others? None of his victims had ever survived before.

Then I remembered looking for Catherine's WAC in the newsroom. I hadn't seen it at her apartment, either. She must have had it on her when she was attacked, which meant that it was in the evidence room in the basement of the precinct, along with whatever else she'd had on her. I was more certain than ever, then, that there was valuable information on the

damned thing—such as, perhaps, notes explaining just what the hell she'd been up to.

I'd have to get hold of it somehow. But first things first. I needed a status report, which meant that I needed a chatty cop with an inside angle. And if I had a friend in the precinct house, it was the man in front of me—Sergeant Lou Brannon. He'd helped me out on a lot of stories in the past. He was a gruff guy, with the toughness of a former beat patrolman; which he was. But he was also the rarest of the rare amongst New York's finest—an honest cop, and a good man to boot.

Still, I felt like he'd given me a boot in the stomach when he greeted me, saying he was sorry to hear about Catherine because he'd liked her and enjoyed talking with her on her many recent visits to the station house.



"Her what?" I stuttered. This was news to me. I hadn't sent her to the police for anything. In fact, I'd made clear to her that I was the one who dealt with the cops, period, end of story. Mostly, I'd been sending her out to interview relatives of the victims.

"She came down here all the time," Brannon told me. "Said she was doing your legwork."

It threw me for a moment; Catherine, I was beginning to surmise, had a lot of secrets.

I tried not to let my confusion show and decided instead to try out a couple of things on Brannon. He was usually privy to the details of ongoing investigations, and his greatest loyalty was to the truth. If he had anything, he'd give it to me.

I started with some questions about the Stein case. That was the most recent murder scene, and it had been a mess; there

had to be some clues there. The fact that Stein had been decked into the library, for instance. But if Magnotta had learned anything about that, Brannon wasn't wise to it. "Hell, Quinlan, it's a public library. You could visit it yourself," he said.

The name Salisbury didn't mean anything to him either, and when I mentioned that Magnotta had smashed the mug on which the word had been inscribed, Brannon was completely underwhelmed. "It ain't the first time he's destroyed evidence," he muttered disdainfully.

I stopped short—this sounded like evidence in itself. Evidence that Magnotta was up to something.

Lou had nothing beyond that, however. The case was going nowhere, as far as he knew.

"Cripes," I muttered. Then, only half under my breath, I added, "I think it's time to bribe a photographer . . . ."

No bites; Lou was scanning some paperwork.

"Where's Stasiak?" I asked bluntly.

Brannon snorted in derision and didn't look up from his paperwork. "Wyoming," he said.

"C'mon, Lou," I persisted. "I didn't have much of a chance to talk to him at the scene. Maybe he picked up on something the rest of us missed."

Brannon looked up from his paperwork. "I'm not kidding," he insisted. He put down his pen, as if for emphasis, and leaned forward. "This Ripper stuff got to him. He took a leave of absence. Cold Karl's shook. Cold Karl's gone."

The phone rang and Brannon turned away. I stood there, mulling it all over. The most cold-blooded, level-headed, ultra-perceptive cop on the case had booked out, and the lead investigator was known among his peers for destroying evidence. Things were not going well.

But while I waited for Brannon to get off the phone, something

about it all resonated in my head, like part of it had stuck in my craw: the part about the lead investigator destroying evidence. Then I realized why this was significant. I nodded a hasty good-bye to the back of Lou's head and hustled down the ramp to the evidence room, hoping Magnotta hadn't been there before me.

As soon as I stepped in the room I saw that I was finally going to get a break. Staffing the desk that day was the original skank himself, officer Warren Spankowski, right where I'd hoped he'd be.

I practically rubbed my hands together in grim satisfaction at seeing his miserable, pockmarked face. Now I'd get some answers, I thought, thinking how I was going to play Spankowski like a violin. I think this is what the psychologically aware are speaking about when they use the term "venting."

Spankowski, for his part, didn't help himself any with his jovial greeting: He cringed and said, "Oh, Christ, not you ... "

This was going to be too easy, I told myself. "I need the evidence in the Powell case," I told him calmly. With a smile, no less.

He cursed, he stammered, he whined. He pointed out how he could lose his job if he let a civilian so much as glance at official police evidence.

I waited till he was done.

"Spanky, Spanky, Spanky," I began. I laid it on thick. I was smiling, rolling my eyes, examining my wing tips, then the ceiling. I hated this creep. "Maybe it's time for me to go down to the D.A.'s office and let him know about the little evidence-selling incident that came to my attention?"

His demeanor changed. "Jeez, Quinlan, how long you gonna hold that over me?" he whined.

"For the rest of your life," I told him happily. It was true, too.

He crawled out of sight into the holding area, and returned with the tray of Catherine's possessions. He plopped it on the counter and stood there, his eyes flicking back and forth nervously in anticipation of someone coming in. I leaned forward leisurely and peered into the tray.

My smugness sloughed off instantly: Catherine's WAC wasn't there. I felt a flash of anger—at Magnotta, at the Ripper, at everybody involved in the case in general; at the swine in front of me.

"Magnotta took it!" Spankowski bleated when I grabbed him by the collar. "The guy's always taking evidence! He thinks he owns the place!"

Now I was in a really foul mood. I needed to assert myself on somebody, even if it was a worthless specimen like Spankowski.

"But he doesn't own the place, does he Spank?" I asked.

Now I had him really confused. It was pitiful, but I needed this. I had a lot of aggression building up, and I knew I wouldn't be able to spend it on Magnotta.

"Huh?" Spank pleaded, as I twisted his collar a little tighter.

"He doesn't own the place, does he Spank?" I repeated.

"Uh, no, nah—"

I pulled him right up to my face.

"Who does?" I growled softly.

"You do—you do!" he got out.

I planted a kiss on his forehead and dropped him back down to his feet.

"And don't you forget it," I told him. Then I left.

What can I say? I was loaded for bear, and all I'd come across was this measly skunk.

And now I was ready to talk to Detective Vince Magnotta.

Chapter 4

WHERE THE COPS ARE WHEN YOU NEED THEM

A funny thing happened when I got to Magnotta's office. I knocked on the door, and when nobody answered, my hand accidentally fell on the doorknob, twisted it somehow, and it opened. Imagine that. You'd think a cop would know enough to lock his door. I figured I'd better go in and make sure everything was safe.

In order to make sure, on Detective Magnotta's behalf, that everything was where it was supposed to be, I decided to rather hurriedly check on as much as I possibly could. Essentially, I intended to ransack his office.

I moved like a man who'd downed a black beauty the size of a horse pill just moments before, scanning the room as I made for his desk. The place was tidy as a pin. Only a box of cigars and a couple of documents sat on the desktop.

Getting frustrated—it was the opportunity of a lifetime, and nothing was happening—I grabbed at one of the documents. It was the arrest report of some petty hoodlum, signed by another hoodlum, Magnotta. I

scanned it into my WAC database; it's handy to have certain signatures on record, I've learned. But this was pretty unsatisfactory as far as evidence went. I snatched up the other document, and this is where I found something interesting. It was the case report on a murder. I knew that Magnotta had been assigned exclusively to the Ripper case, so this had to be related.

I glanced toward the door. I'd had the foresight to close it behind me. I quickly scanned the report into my database, then examined it more closely and saw that it was torn along the edge, as if ripped from another file. This immediately aroused my suspicions—why would Magnotta feel the need to steal this report? Clearly, he didn't want anyone to know he had it.

The thing was, the report was for a murder that didn't even come close to matching the Ripper's m.o. It was for some Central Park resident who'd been shot to death about a month before, a man much older than all the known Ripper victims. The victim's name was Hamilton Wofford.

I guess it wasn't inconceivable that the Ripper had murdered this guy—after all, Catherine's attack didn't fit his normal m.o. either. Still, it seemed highly unlikely that this was his evil handiwork. After all, the Ripper had laid claim to Catherine's attack, as well as all the others. I hadn't heard a word from Jack about this one.

I skimmed the page, trying to take in as much as I could, my eyes racing from line to line. Concurrently, in the back of my mind, I began to have a vague recollection of the case—I hadn't covered it, but *The Herald* had sent out some stringer to file a story, only to bury it because there hadn't been any apparent connection to the Ripper case, and that was the murder case everyone wanted to read about.

So why did Magnotta have it in his personal Ripper file? Obviously, he saw some link I was missing. But as I continued to scrutinize the report more and more closely, squinting my eyes

as if that could help me find the hidden connection, I couldn't deduce what it was.

Which meant that I was concentrating so hard I didn't hear the door opening. I did, however, feel the hand on my shoulder.

"Looking for something, Quinlan?" Magnotta asked. "Because if I find out you were going through my stuff, I'd be glad to give you seventy-two hours in the Tombs for tampering with an investigation."

I was angry in an instant—at myself, for being so stupid as to miss the fact that if Magnotta had left such a top-secret report out in the open on his desk, it must have been because he'd just ducked out for a moment. But then I realized that if he had indeed swiped the Wofford file, he wouldn't want anybody to know he had it. Busting me would bring that to light, so I was safe. Safe enough to ask him about it.

"Who was Hamilton Wofford?" I asked him. "And what does his murder have to do with the Ripper case?"

Magnotta stared at me for a moment, assessing the situation. Then he told me to forget it, it had nothing to do with the Ripper case.

I let it pass; it was another lead I could follow up on my own later. Meanwhile, I still had a rare opportunity to plug Magnotta alone in the relative sanctuary of his office, instead of at a busy and disconcertingly bloody murder site. I could ask him some point-blank questions, and he couldn't beg off to deal with an underling, or tell me I was interfering with his investigation of a fresh crime scene.

I started with what I thought was a whale of a roundhouse—I told him Catherine's WAC had been taken from the evidence room. "And Spankowski says you have it," I said.

He dodged it as effortlessly as he'd dodged talking about the Wofford file.

"Then it's not missing, is it, genius?" he said sarcastically. "Why don't you try leaving the police work to me?"

"All right," I said. "How about that police work? Any new developments?"

"Yeah," he cracked. "The pile of bodies is getting bigger."

I could see already I was going to get nowhere with him. He had no new leads, he didn't want to talk about the Wofford case, he didn't want to talk about Catherine's case ... He was playing me like a barn cat plays a mouse. About all I could get out of him was that the Meta-Cog doctor in charge of Catherine's care was supposed to be pretty good. In fact, something about the way Magnotta mentioned this seemed to indicate he knew this doctor better than he was letting on.

He wasn't saying enough for me to come to any firm conclusions, however, and I could see he wasn't going to. As much as I wanted to ask him about this doctor, or about why he seemed to be dragging his feet on the investigation, I knew it was pointless just then. And meanwhile, I was feeling anxious about Catherine; I hadn't seen her since she'd collapsed in my arms. I decided to quit what was an obviously hopeless interview and get my fanny over to the Meta-Cog.

I'd come back at Magnotta when I had some more ammunition. In the meantime, it was best to save what little I had, because I knew this wasn't going to be the last sparring match I'd have with Detective Vincent Magnotta. Not by a long shot.

Chapter 5

I VISIT A BRAIN SURGEON AND SHE DOESN'T WANT ME TO STAY

THE interview with Magnotta had left me pretty frustrated, and once I'd managed to get outside and hail a taxi, I realized, too, that I was still pretty shaken by everything that had happened. I felt as if I'd dodged a bullet; the Ripper had come uncomfortably close, I realized.

Running over events in my mind once again—practically feeling the dead weight of Catherine in my arms—I still couldn't take in what was happening. I sat in the back of the cab and stared out the window, my mind replaying it all again and again as I stared at the glass, as if watching a film of it all spool out right there on the window. But gradually, I saw the lights streaming past, the people—the winos, the lonely, the collegiate revelers, the only ones with any business being up at that hour—staggering along the sidewalks like zombies, and as we burst through a drift of steam from a manhole cover it came to me that I wasn't in a dream, but zooming toward a deep and ugly reality.

It was too much for me. I rolled down my window to get some air and collapsed back in the seat. This killer was like none anyone had ever seen before—the incredible brutality, the wash of blood, the utter lack of clues, the regular sickening messages that were like missives from Satan. I experienced a weird rush of thoughts, and they all involved running—as far away as possible.

But as the wind from the cab's open window gushed in on me I realized there was no safe place. The Ripper had struck as close to home as he could without killing me. Maybe I was next on his agenda. Or maybe someone else close to me.

And worse, he'd apparently changed his modus operandi—he hadn't cut Catherine, he'd left her without even so much as a bruise. In other words, there was even less evidence of a weapon in his attack of Catherine. This seemed more heinous to me, somehow, sneakier, more perverse and fearsome … as if he'd simply willed her to death's portal with an omnipotent malevolence. Who knew what in God's name he'd do next, or to whom, or how?

What I did know was that I was no longer the detached reporter. For once in my life I had a stake in a story. Or more accurately, the story no longer mattered. I had to get this guy. For revenge. For self-preservation. For the sake of humanity. Whatever. He had to be stopped. I had to find a way to get him. If the cops couldn't find him, I would.

And so I returned to what I was doing with a grim determination. I needed to see Catherine, to see who was taking care of her and make sure she was going to hang on while I hunted down her attacker. And who knew—even if she was in a coma, maybe it would help her, somehow, to know I was after this guy myself now, after him with a blood vengeance. They say people in comas can still hear you sometimes.

I leaned forward to the cabbie, barked my destination at him and

told him to step on it. He turned to me with a smile as broad as the East River and said something cheerful and lackadaisical and completely indecipherable. He didn't speak English.

Vowing to do a searing exposé on the fact that they don't require cabbies to know the rudiments of the national language, I repeated myself slowly and loudly until the guy said it after me. "Meta-Cog," he repeated. His accent was murder. He kept looking at me in the rearview with that big, foreign smile. He seemed to understand where I wanted to go, but he kept looking back at me with that smile. So I gave him the idea of *how* I wanted him to get me there—fast—when I slapped him on the back of the head.

His eyes returned to the road and his hands tightened on the wheel.

It seemed to take hours nonetheless, although in reality the cabbie seemed to finally understand that I was in wicked shape and he did his best to get me there toot sweet. When he finally pulled up in front of the Meta-Cog, I threw some money at him and jumped out, but I doubled back and leaned into the open window before he could pull away.

"Hey!" I said.

The guy flinched.

"I'm sorry," I told him.

He just looked at me dumbly, cowering behind the wheel.

I realized I was mumbling. I felt like I wasn't speaking English myself.

So I spoke a little louder, trying to wrap my lips around the words succinctly. "I shouldn't have hit you," I hollered at him, "that wasn't right. It's just that my girlfriend—"

"Yes, yes!" he said with a terrified smile. I could see he had his foot on the accelerator, ready to gun it, so I leaned in a little closer.

"Look, I'm trying to apologize," I boomed, "I—"

"Oh yes, yes!" he screamed. Then he floored it.

I jumped back just in time.

"For the love of—" I started; then I stifled it, turned, and stomped into the building.

I was still in Marine mode when I strode into the lobby of the Meta-Cog. The enormous interior gave me pause, however. Apparently, the people running the place didn't give much credence to the belief that atmosphere contributed to therapy: The place was dark and gloomy, with marble floors and columns and a large, domed vault looming high overhead. It felt like a mausoleum.

I went to the reception desk and stared with determination at the pretty receptionist while she finished what seemed to be a personal phone call. Her name tag identified her as Vivien Santiago; as soon as she concluded her call, I told her I was there to see Catherine Powell, and I wanted to talk to whoever was in charge of her care.

"That would be Dr. Clare Burton," she told me. The name rang a bell, although I couldn't nail it to a particular story; just a famous doctor of some sort, one of those people who showed up on the science pages on a slow news day. Vivien Santiago gave me directions to the wards on the second floor. Catherine was in the intensive care unit. As an afterthought, I asked where Vic Farley's unit was located these days; I hadn't been to visit him in a while. Santiago told me he'd been relocated to the basement. Knowing Vic, it made sense. I started off for the ICU, figuring I'd save Vic for revival purposes later.

"Hey," she called after me as I started off.

I stopped and looked back at her. She gave me a wink. "When you're talking to Burton, don't stand too close to her," she told me.

"Why not?"

"Kinda chilly," she confided.

I realized I'd been a bit short with her, and gave her as much of a smile as I could muster. I was genuinely grateful, but it was also another one of those reporter's tactics: It pays to be nice to receptionists, secretaries, desk sergeants, etc. If they flirt with you, so much the better. They usually have their finger on the pulse of a place, and you never know what they'll feed you.

I found the ICU in short order and strode through the automatic doors—they were layered, as if it were the entrance to a submarine—to find myself in a dimly lit lab room filled with innumerable computers and monitors and high-tech consoles. The room was some sort of antechamber—an observation lab—to the ICU itself. I looked off through a large plate-glass window where a curtain had been drawn around the patient. All around me, the hardware was chirping and beeping in the background, like the heartbeat of robots.

At a lab table directly in front of me was a remarkably good-looking woman in a lab coat, standing there like a gorgeous pit bull: Her nameplate said Clare Burton.

Quickly, I told her who I was, and the look on her face made me suspect she recognized my name. This would have annoyed me, because I knew I was becoming known not as a good writer but as the guy who the Ripper wrote to; I cut to the chase.

"Is she going to be all right?" I asked.

Burton was as blunt as her stance. "It doesn't look good," she said. "Her consciousness is deeply withdrawn. Her mental processes, her memory—all the basic building blocks of her personality—are deeply withdrawn."

I took this in and looked toward the curtain surrounding Catherine in the next room.

"You mean … she's in there but you can't reach her?"

Burton's chill seemed to dissipate slightly, but her instinct toward medical straightforwardness was stronger than her impulse toward pointless compassion. "That's a best-case scenario," she told me.

I thought this over while I considered how to proceed. It was clear this woman didn't want me in the ICU, and I certainly didn't want to keep her for a moment from tending to Catherine. Still, I was on a quest now; I needed reassurance and information. I decided to allow myself to slip into journalistic override, meaning I would ask every question I could. Two could play this pit bull game.

My first tack didn't fare so well, however—I tried to play Burton harder for sympathy, and she cut me off at the knees.

As it turned out, she did indeed know who I was, and she didn't think much of me, even if I was the bereaved boyfriend. "Yeah, reporters are real sensitive," she muttered sardonically.

"You know who I am?" I asked.

"Sure," she said. "You've gotten pretty famous, Mr. Quinlan—for making a psychopath a star."

It was hard to recover after that, but I persevered. I asked her if Catherine had a chance, and Burton hedged. I asked her if she'd ever had a case like this before and she said not really. I asked her if she had any leads on the weapon and she said she hadn't a clue. I asked her why she thought Catherine had survived the

Ripper's attack when no one else ever had before. She said maybe she just got away. I asked her what she planned to do, and she said nothing as long as I kept asking her questions.

By the time I'd run through every question I could think of, I was feeling defeated, but when I ran it back over in my mind I realized that Burton had indeed let a few things slip. I'd managed to get at least two bits of information out of her, although both of them were of questionable significance.

For one thing, the good doctor had informed me that they'd brought Catherine to the Meta-Cog because it was the finest facility in the world for cyber-cognitive retrieval—they specialized in rebuilding memories and such in damaged brains. Or, as Burton put it, they decked into the minds of patients with damaged psyches and sent "data angels" into their consciousness in an attempt to rebuild them. It was confusing stuff to the uninitiated, though, and Burton was pretty terse about it all.

The other thing I surmised all by myself, based on my reading of Burton's attitude, and that was that she seemed awfully hesitant to attempt anything. She claimed Catherine might be too far gone.

And by the time I'd figured all this out, Burton herself was gone.

"Nice talking to you," I muttered to the door swinging closed behind her.

At that moment, a throat cleared behind me. It seemed I wasn't alone in the observation lab.

Hidden by the stacks of monitoring equipment was another doctor, a guy who introduced himself as Bud Cable. He'd been toiling over some readouts in the shadowy background during my exchange with Burton. In comparison to the iceberg that was Catherine's attending physician, this guy was a cuddly puppy. Unfortunately for him, I was still on journalistic override, which does not brake for puppies. And he didn't help himself

any when he muttered under his breath—as if in sympathy with me—that I shouldn't worry, Catherine was in good hands ... but she'd be in better hands if Burton would allow her assistants to begin treating her.

It confirmed my own suspicions, and like I say I was on override, so I pounced on the guy, hit him upside the head with every question I could think of. And like a champ who took the Hippocratic oath as gospel, Dr. Bud Cable responded with some news I could use.

For one thing, he complained further that Burton was actually working against the advice of her assistants, of whom he was one. He thought they should begin immediately to try to rebuild Catherine's psyche with the aforementioned data angels.

But my ears perked up when Cable posited what he thought might be a reason for Burton's recalcitrance. It seemed that, just before I'd gotten there, Dr. Burton had had a visit from a cop named Magnotta. What's more, they'd had a fight, a real blowout ... the kind of fight that didn't sound professional ... the kind of fight that people have when they know each other really well.

I made a note to pursue this when I went to the police station later. In the meantime, I asked Cable to explain the memory-rebuilding business to me, and things continued to get more and more interesting.

He told me how they download as much as they can from a patient's mind, then they send in the angels to get more. He gave me an example of what they'd gotten so far out of Catherine's mind.

"An image on one of the monitors," he said. "It's displaying a face we retrieved from Catherine's memory. In her condition, her mind can only assemble an extremely distorted image—but she saw the person who attacked her."

It took a minute for the words to sink in. Then the full import of what he was saying came to me: They had an image of the Ripper's face.

I pressed him on this. I pressed him hard. He told me there was a chance—an outside chance, but a chance nonetheless—that the image could be improved, but that only Catherine herself could do that. The more she remembered, the more the image would be restored. But in her present condition, there was no guarantee she would remember any more. Unless, of course, they helped her remember—unless they sent in an angel to rebuild her memory.

I felt like hugging the guy. I felt like adding a kiss when he suggested that rebuilding her memory might, as well, improve her overall chance for recovery.

"Every cell in your body has a memory," he explained, "memories of pain and pleasure, memories of simple functionality. Think of healing as the body simply remembering to do what it's supposed to do. Ergo, the more Ms. Powell's capacity for memory is rebuilt, the better her chance for recovery. Which is why I don't quite understand Dr. Burton's ... reluctance."

The last remark confirmed that this guy was going to be a good source—reporters thrive on even mildly cynical subordinates. Better than that, though, was that Cable was looking out for Catherine.

I'd learned as much as I could there, and now I was feeling the need to get on with the investigation—the urgency of catching a serial killer was returning to me with all the impact of

a freight train, especially now that he'd struck close to home. And now, after talking with Dr. Cable, I felt it was safe to leave; Catherine was indeed in good hands if she had this guy looking out for her.

I thanked him, then wandered over to the plate glass to stare into the ICU. Cable had gone back to work, and Burton was gone, so I probably could have wandered in there to see Catherine. But I suddenly felt funny about that; I decided that the next time I saw her, I'd have some news that would make the situation seem more hopeful.

Then I noticed that I was standing next to a monitor I suspected was a video med-journal, the thing doctors are supposed to turn on to record their consultations with a patient when the family isn't there to witness it. I glanced over at Cable, saw he was deep in his work, and punched a button.

I was right: a consultation between Burton, Cable and another doctor wavered into focus on the monitor. Their conversation confirmed everything Cable had told me—Burton was firmly resistant to the entreaties of the other doctors to be more aggressive in Catherine's treatment.

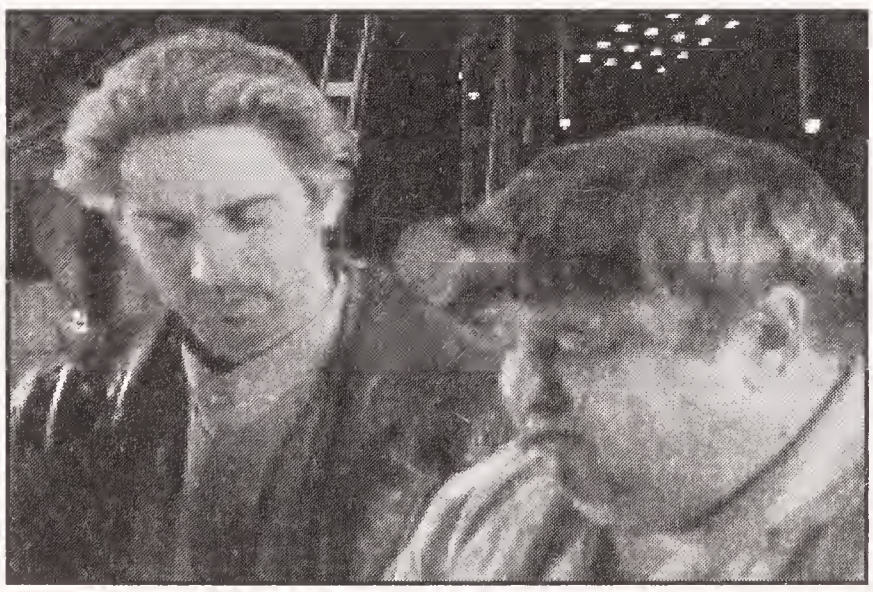
I switched it off and headed for the elevator. Something suspicious was going on, something that left me a little unnerved. First Magnotta seemed to be dragging his feet, now the surgeon in charge of Catherine's care ... I wanted to get to the bottom of things, so I decided to start at the bottom—I headed for the basement, hoping Vic Farley, the man who had examined the bodies of all the other Ripper victims, could fill me in.

Chapter 6

THE HAPPY CORONER

VIC was his usual cheerful self when I found him in the dank basement of the Meta-Cog. He had a cigarette clinging precariously to his lower lip while he worked over the open torso of a fresh corpse, and I noticed the remnants of a sandwich on an empty plate nearby. Vic was more or less a coroner, and he loved two things: food and his job.

"Hey, Vic," I called out as I entered the room slowly. The place always gave me the creeps, what with all the bodies floating beneath white sheets like a legion of ghosts. I tried to look at the one that was uncovered, the one Vic was working on. "That Renee Stein, last night's Ripper victim?" I asked.



"Nah," he said. "This woman was married to her Ripper." He took a huge drag off his smoke, then dug his hands deep into the chest cavity of the corpse before him. "This is why I don't get married," he added.

I inched my way to within chatting distance. It always took me a few minutes to get acclimated to the various work spaces Vic had been given over the years.

He sensed my discomfort and tried to help by telling me he was sorry to hear about Catherine, but he wasn't much good at small talk. All he ever wanted to talk about was work.

So I got right to it, and asked him if he'd had any luck identifying the murder weapon yet.

As always with Vic, the answer was long and complicated, but delivered with great gusto. I peppered him with questions throughout, trying to make him get to the point, which seemed to be that he didn't have any idea what kind of weapon the Ripper used. What I couldn't understand was *why*—why this was so difficult for a modern-day expert with all the state-of-the-art tools such as those Vic had at his command.

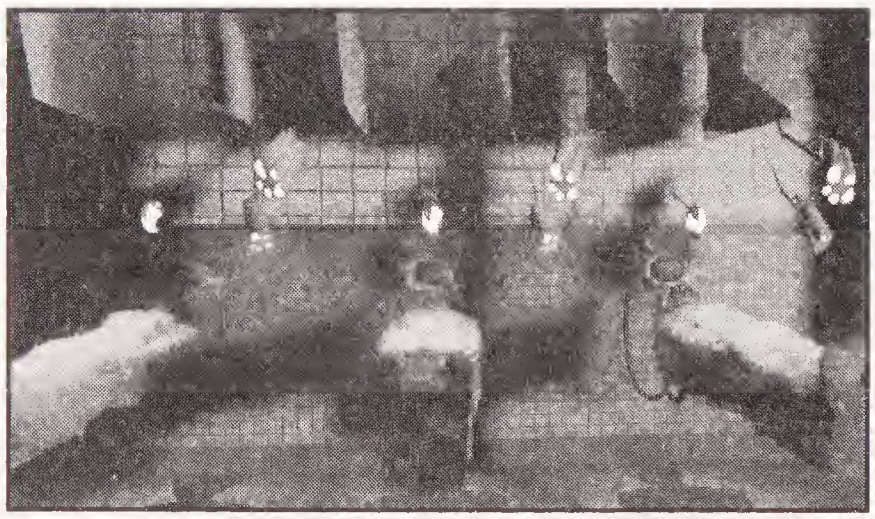
Through careful questioning, though, I managed to get him to frame his answer using audiovisual aids, which is exactly what I wanted. Some of his tools were really cool.

"All right, take a look for yourself," he said. He jerked his chin in the direction of three neighboring gueneys. I knew what they held, but he told me anyway. "Those are the Ripper victims," he told me.

I walked over to the nearest one and hesitated.

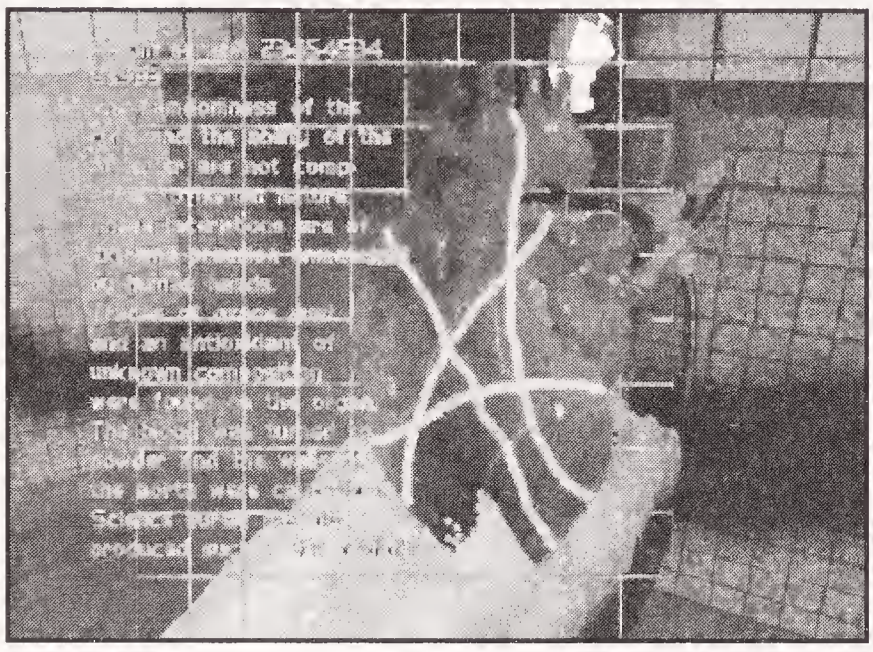
He nodded at the control panel. "Go ahead," he said.

I punched a button and a holographic image swam into view, floating above one storage unit. The hologram depicted an organ—the liver, I think—rotating. Suddenly a seam on the organ's surface appeared, peeling it open.



"Notice the path of the cut?" Vic asked. "Not one millimeter off line. No human hand could have done that, not that perfectly. And something else that's weird—there wasn't a trace of fabric in the wound, not a micrometer. I mean, how can you cut somebody up like that and not get any remnant of their clothing in the wounds? Go to the next one."

I moved on to the next unit, punched a button and watched another organ materialize before me.



"Here's an isolation of just one of the organs from that body," he narrated, as the holographic image was suddenly permeated with lines. There must have been dozens of them. "Those lines indicate all the cuts made to the organ. The sheer number isn't the only amazing thing, though. All of those cuts happened *simultaneously*. And it was like that for every organ in that body."

I was beginning to understand why people were having trouble figuring out what kind of weapon—let alone what kind of person—could have killed these people. But I hadn't seen anything yet.

Vic nodded at the remaining unit.

"For those others, the model was just a computer rendering of the recorded damage. For the one you're standing at now, I tapped the nerve memory of the victim and fed it into the simulator so that I could reenact the attack. Hit the button."

I did, and the floating organ appeared, rotating silently. Then it exploded in a shower of blood and gore so realistic I ducked.

"It's—it's like she swallowed a grenade," I stammered.

"It's like impossible, is what it is," Vic scoffed. "I mean, million-dollar piece of equipment, and look what it gives me." He was shaking his head as he took a drag off his smoke, then dove his hands back into the innards of the body before him. The real innards, I might add. "The long and the short of it is, Quinlan, I got no idea what kind of weapon this maniac's using."

So much for that line of inquiry. I decided to ask him what

he'd heard about Catherine. I was planning to work my way around to discreetly asking him about his colleague, Dr. Burton, but he volunteered an opinion on her before I could get to it.

"Your girlfriend's in good hands, Burton's a good doctor," he chirped. "And if she gets stuck, she'll just call in her secret weapon."

I was still stunned by the exploding organ display, but I wasn't too stunned to let his comment slip by me.

"Secret weapon?"

"A guy named Joey Falconetti. Cyberspace expert she uses on tough cases. The guy's incredible. I'm surprised she hasn't called him in yet to look at your friend."

I pressed him further, and found out that this "secret weapon," who was also known by his c-space moniker, Falcon Eddie, was especially adept at human-to-human decking—exactly the kind of decking it would take to rebuild Catherine's memory. Strangely, though, Burton hadn't called him in on any of the Ripper cases, Farley noted.

It was enough, finally, to make me completely distrust Clare Burton, despite her fame and Farley's claim that she was top-notch. Why hadn't she called this guy in immediately? Especially if it meant coming up with a picture of the Ripper? It would help her patient, and help the police. Something mighty peculiar was going on.

In any event, until I could get to the bottom of it, I decided then and there to track down Joey Falconetti myself and get him in to help Catherine.

The problem with this, however, was that Falconetti was apparently some kind of notorious hacking outlaw, wanted by the police, and he was hard to get ahold of.

Or, as Vic put it, "Quinlan, Quinlan, Quinlan ... Falconetti don't want to be found, you ain't gonna find him. And to tell you the truth, maybe you don't want to find him. He's a little scary."

But I insisted, and the best Vic could offer me by way of advice was to tell me to check with a guy named Gambit Nelson, a shady, supposedly retired gambler who hung out at a bar called the Cafe Duchamp. Vic seemed to think Nelson had conducted some possibly shady business with Falconetti, and he might be able to provide me, at least, with a WELL address—it was a safe bet that a famous hacker would have such a location in cyberspace, the same way that it was a safe bet that a businessman in the real world would have an office.

It sounded like a convoluted lead, though, and I sighed at the thought of all the footwork. I had other things to do first, but still, there was no question that this would have to be high on my list.

The last thing I needed, however, was a lead that took a long time to track down, and I decided I'd better get myself back in motion. Plus, if I stayed there much longer, I was afraid I'd never be able to eat again.

Nearly as an afterthought, I asked Vic one final question, which was whether he'd had much interaction with Vince Magnotta.

He said not only that he hadn't—for which he was grateful, because he considered Magnotta to be a pain in the posterior—but that Magnotta seemed distinctly uninterested in this case.

That was enough for me. I already suspected that Magnotta was dragging his feet on this one, and now here was the city pathologist telling me the lead investigator on the worst murder case in New York's history wasn't even checking with him. It was time for me to head to the police station.

I thanked Vic and told him I'd bring him a hoagie next time I was around.

"Throw in a carton of smokes and I'll tell you something useful next time," he replied.

"You've already done that," I told him. "Besides, keep smoking

those things and you'll be on one of those slabs soon. There'll be a little holographic image of your shriveled, black lungs floating above your body."

"Just stick the hoagie in my face and I won't mind," he said.

Chapter 7

ALL ROADS LEAD TO HOBOKEN

THE deadline for filing my daily story on the Ripper was looming, and I was feeling the need to return to the newsroom. But deadlines were the last thing on my mind. Maybe the word had just taken on too many connotations lately. In any case, I stopped off at the police station again, briefly, to grill Magnotta on Burton's foot-dragging, and to sound him out about Joey Falconetti. All I found out was that Magnotta did, indeed, seem to know Burton personally—"She's never dogged it in her life," he told me—and that the very name of Joey Falconetti seemed to piss him off. I left feeling more than ever that Magnotta was hiding something from me ...

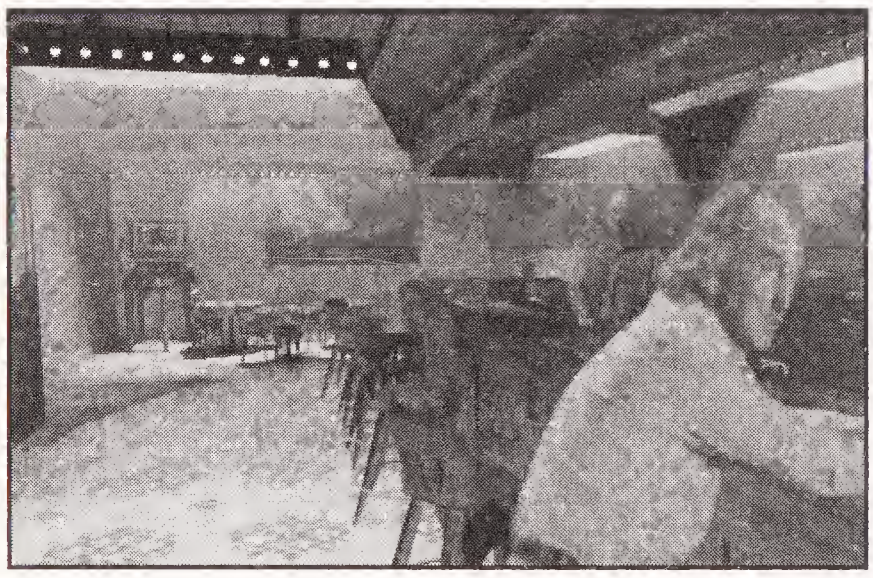
And that it was imperative that I get ahold of Joey Falconetti. Magnotta cursed him. Clearly, he didn't want me to talk to him, which made me think that I definitely should. More importantly, if there was the chance that Falconetti could help Catherine, not to mention help to rebuild the image of the Ripper that Bud Cable had preserved on the ICU monitor, I had to find him.

It all meant that I had to find him, no matter how much time it took. Catherine, and the Ripper himself, had more pressing deadlines than I did.

Of course, everyone had indicated that finding the notorious Falcon Eddie was going to be not only difficult, but probably

dangerous as well. I didn't know what he was wanted for, but he sounded like a dangerous character. Anybody who'd been on the lam for as long as he apparently had was not only pretty good at hiding, but likely to be paranoid as hell about preserving his freedom. But I simply had no choice. And, based on what Vic Farley had told me, it sounded like the only way I was going to reach him was via cyberspace. How dangerous could it be?

I set out to track down the contact Farley had told me about, Gambit Nelson, which meant a trip to the Cafe Duchamp. That was okay by me—I'd always liked the place, and I was starting to feel like I needed a drink. Possibly several.



I realized when I got there, though, that I'd better limit myself. I had a tendency to anesthetize myself when under pressure, a tendency brought into sharp focus when the bartender started talking to me like I was an old pal. I had no idea who he was. Maybe he was just one of those diligent saloon keepers who memorizes the name and the drink of everyone who so much as steps in his place. Maybe I'm just one of those garrulous drunks who makes himself well-known. In any case, the guy knew who Gambit Nelson was, and he pointed him out to me. I knocked back just one beer while quickly grilling the barkeep sotto voce on Nelson's background; I found out he was an old-time hacker who'd made a killing in the net's early days. Then I went to work.

Gambit Nelson was an affable fellow, and as it turned out, he had a lot to say about Falconetti. It seems they'd been in business together, years before, some dubious-sounding global

net location that Nelson swore had been legit. Falconetti had robbed him blind, but Nelson still seemed to like his former partner anyway.

"Damn shame," he said, "the way that guy wastes his talent." The Falcon, as Nelson called him, had apparently been more into flashy hacking and making money. "Eddie's a thief by nature," he said with a sigh.

This was all years before, it sounded like, and I started to worry that, nice as it was to chat with an old guy who'd been some interesting places, his info was going to be seriously out of date. But then he told me that he still kept tabs on Falconetti, in order to make sure he didn't pilfer any of Nelson's ongoing operations. It made me smile to think that the old guy was still somewhat of an operator.

"So where can I find him?" I pressed.

"You can't," he said. "He finds you."

I pressed the old man a little harder, asked him how I could make Falconetti find me *now*.

He eyed me up and down, then shrugged. I guess I looked harmless enough. Considering the case I was working on, I didn't know if this was good or bad.

In any case, my wimpy exterior probably led Nelson to explain that Falconetti spent most of his time in cyberspace. "He keeps his body well hidden," he said. "But there's a guy named Twig who seems to take care of him. He lives out in Hoboken. He always seems to know where Eddie's at. That's the contact I gave the people at Meta-Cog, anyway, and I haven't heard any complaints from them."

I thanked him and stopped at the bar on my way out. I slapped a twenty down on the bar and told the bartender to keep Gambit lubricated. Then I headed for the door.

"Quinlan," Gambit called just before I stepped out into the night. I looked back. "Watch yourself with the Falcon. He really is a bird of prey." Then he tipped his glass my way. I nodded, smiled, and left, my mind already trying to figure out how I could get Ben Dodds to let up on my deadline long enough to allow me to track down a lead or two, and squeeze in a trip to Hoboken.

Chapter 8

DUMPSTER DIVING AT THE LIBRARY

GETTING Ben Dodds off my case when I got back to the newsroom was a matter of saying "certainly" and "sure" a lot.

"You gonna have a story to me by deadline for once in your godforsaken life?" he asked.

"Certainly," I said.

"You serious?"

"Sure." I was bluffing. I had nothing concrete to build a story around. Besides the mysterious Falconetti, all I had was a vague lead at the New York Virtual Library, a lead I wanted to get to before it got any colder.

The problem was, Ben had that sixth sense that all top-notch editors have. "You been out getting a bunch of stuff that you can use right now, or just chasing your own tail?" he asked me.

"Sure," I said. I was trying to sidestep him back to my desk.

"What? Which is it? Quinlan—"

I was at my desk. I had my decking unit and visor in hand.

"Quinlan!"

It was too late. I was decked in, and I knew that, mad as Dodds got, he never yanked anyone out of c-space. Ben was one of those old-fashioned guys who got a little nervous when it came to decking. He didn't like it—he called it handing over your brain to a "goddamn computer." Whenever Ben used the word "computer," in fact, he always prefaced it with the word "goddamn." By his standards, decking was a risky business, and

he was impressed by any reporter who decked in as regularly as I did. He figured it meant I knew what I was doing.

I felt the familiar tingling on my forearms as I zoomed into the central WELL directory and landed on virtual ground. I swallowed back the nausea that always accompanied the entry into cyberspace, gave my head a minute to adjust, then selected the entrance icon for the library. Luckily, when it asked for the entrance code word, I remembered seeing it on Renee Stein's computer—"Victorian."

Strange as it may sound for a writer, I never liked libraries for some reason. And I liked virtual libraries even less. The programmers did a good job designing the virtual New York Public Library—they had the columns and the tall shelves down to a tee, and something about the way the light cut in through the two-story windows seemed to generate virtual dust motes that made my nose tickle. But it still gave me the creeps.

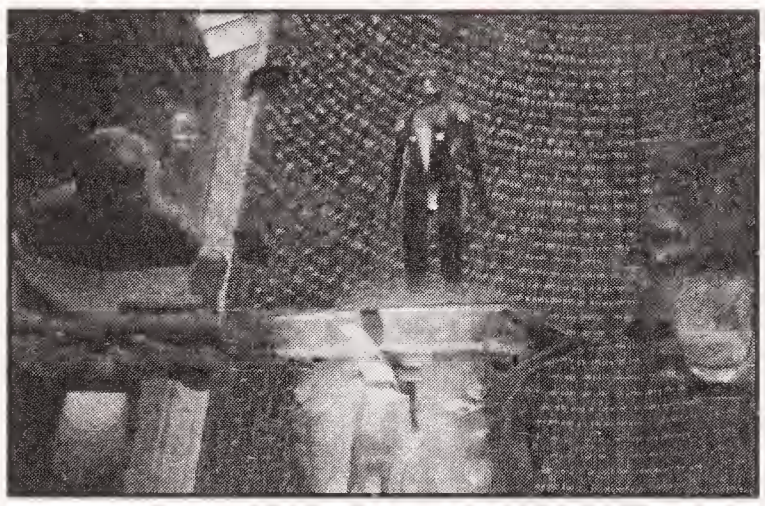
I hunted around till I found a librarian. She seemed to appear, hovering, out of nowhere.

"You represent a real person, or you an AI?" I asked her. I never have gotten used to the idea of data angels representing real people in cyberspace, even though I was one myself at that point. I suspected everyone in c-space of being an artificial intelligence.

"All the librarians here are real people," the librarian contradicted me. And I believed her. For example, she herself was just as condescending as the real thing.

I asked her if she could help me track down what Stein was up to, but all she could do was confirm that the late Ms. Stein had indeed been there. She

told me, too, that the cops had already grilled her on this; minor information, but I was glad I'd asked for it. At least then I knew there was a chance Magnotta had destroyed evidence again.



The librarian left me to my own devices and I looked around, searching for I don't know what. The shelves seemed to stretch up to infinity. When a flaming garbage-can icon floated by I looked into it like a natural-born scavenger. It had only been a few hours since Stein had been there; maybe she'd discarded some notes.

But all I found was a piece of paper with some call numbers scribbled on it—a printout of various books requested over the last few hours. When I scanned the list, however, I saw what I was looking for: a call-letter request from "RStein."

I took the form to the librarian.

"Hmm ..." she muttered. "This shows that Stein signed out a book, but the call letters seem to have been encoded." I saw that the listing for Stein's book had been bracketed; she was an editor, not a spy, and so her encryption was obvious, and easy to bust. She'd signed out a history book, and the list showed me history books were prefixed with "HC." After that, she'd written something about "I aid plus 1," which I took to mean 20-20, as in perfect vision, plus one, or 20-21. After that was the number 18, which I guessed meant the 18th letter of the alphabet, "R." Thus, I had HC2021R. I took this to the librarian and—bingo—she produced a book about Jack the Ripper. The original, not the remake.

I was stunned. I looked down at it, feeling a small but intense frisson of fear. The last person to read this was now dead. What secret did it hold? I was almost afraid to open it. Then I decided, instead, to

download it; I didn't want to stand there and read the whole thing. Plus, Falconetti was waiting for me. So I tried to sneak out with it.

The librarian caught me, though, just like they did when I was a kid. "That's a reference book only," she said. "You can't check that out. No downloading of reference material."

She snatched it out of my hands.

"I'm in kind of a hurry," I told her.

"Then it will be here when you get back. This is a reference book. Not you, not the police, not God himself can take this book out of here."

To be perfectly honest, she was scary. I decided to let it go. I didn't need to know any more about the history of Jack the Ripper, anyway. I already knew more than I wanted to know. Plus, the book was a straightforward biography of the original case. I could find the information elsewhere, or come back later. For the moment, the important thing was knowing that Renee Stein had been researching material on the original Ripper. Did the current case have some connection to the original? I experienced a sinking feeling as the one thing I knew about the first Jack the Ripper came to me: He'd never been caught.

I booted out back to my desk, and as soon as I regained my senses, I saw Ben Dodds beckoning me from his office. He must have been watching me like a hawk to see when I took off my decking visor. He wanted my article, I knew, and he wanted it yesterday. I had to think fast.

When I stepped into his office, however, he surprised me with a brief burst of humanity.

"How's Catherine?" he asked.

"The same," I told him.

He lapsed into a grim, head-shaking stare for a minute. I thought about taking advantage of his momentary distraction to make a break for the door, but then I had an idea.

"Ben," I asked. "You remember anything about the murder of a guy named Wofford?"

Chapter 8

"Yeah, sure. Virtual architect who lived in a cottage up in old Central Park. Victim was shot, no motive, cops are clueless."

At least it saved me looking up the article in the newspaper's morgue. I asked him about Magnotta while I was at it. Ben was a veritable cornucopia of background info, after thirty or forty years pounding the pavement and red-penning stories to death.

"Typical modern cop," Ben said, with a face that, nonetheless, showed his distaste for this particular cop. "Aggressive as hell, works like a dog to get his bounty. Bends the rules worse than most. Killed six men in the line of duty, most under questionable circumstances. I wouldn't mess with him."

I think I must have gulped, because Ben was suddenly nodding with me in agreement, as if gulping were the appropriate response to Magnotta's record. I hadn't known that the surly detective was quite *that* aggressive.

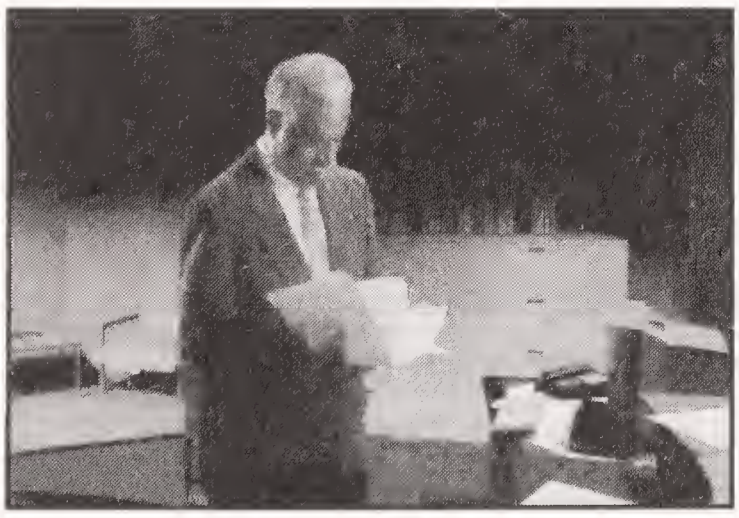
"What about a guy named Falconetti?" I asked, but Ben couldn't help me on that one.

"What about your story?" he asked, as I stood there for a moment, mulling over the trigger-happy tendencies of Detective Magnotta. "You got it done yet?"

"Sure," I said. "Certainly."

I started to edge away.

"You better have," Ben said, before turning and heading back to his office.



I had a few more things to check out before I headed out to Hoboken; then I figured I'd write something on my laptop on the ride out there and send it back to Ben electronically. But as I was leaving, I had one final idea. I stopped off at Catherine's desk and stared at it for a second, hoping I'd missed

something during my earlier inspection. I was amazed, once again, at how neatly organized she was. Too organized. This struck me as suspicious, as if she'd cleaned it up before running out to get attacked, as if she'd wanted to leave a neat impression behind. Kind of like changing your underwear before going out to get hit by a bus. I can't say why I thought this, but something had been eating away at me since I found out from Brannon that she'd been visiting the police station behind my back.

I activated her Rolodex and starting flipping through names. It had suddenly occurred to me that if she'd been talking to Brannon, maybe she'd lifted some of my other sources, too. But besides Lou's entry, I didn't recognize any of the names there—names like "Soap Beatty" and "George Rhodes."

The point was, Catherine got all her leads, assignments, and contacts from me, so there shouldn't have been anybody in there that I didn't give her. But there was.

Using my WAC notebook, I carefully copied all the entries I didn't recognize, even as something in me sagged at the thought of still more leads to track down. I knew, at least, which one I would start with—someone named Soap Beatty, who was listed as the owner of a smoke shop down on Canal Street in the Village. His entry also had a cryptic note about "bugs" and "hacker contacts."

This one stumped me completely. Catherine didn't smoke. What in the world could she have been doing with this guy? Maybe I was making mountains out of molehills, but if you put enough molehills together, you got, well, a really big molehill.

I didn't have a chance to get much farther in her Rolodex, however. All of a sudden, a storm front rolled in: I heard Ben Dodds suddenly bellowing my name. He must have gone straight to his desk and checked his on-line editing file to look for my story.

I managed to get out of there, but just barely. I started tapping out a story on my laptop even as the elevator descended to the ground.

Chapter 9

I PLAY WITH ROCKS

AS Catherine's apartment was fairly close to the *Herald* building, I decided to stop off there and check out the odd little note she'd left me about her crystals. I expected nothing—having, as I did, no respect for crystal worship—but my thoughts had returned to the part of the note that said, "If something happens to me ... ." More and more, I'd come to suspect that Catherine was keeping things from me, and I was frustrated about my failure to get at what I suspected was a real treasure trove—her WAC. But, short of that, I'd decided to run down the few other leads she'd left me, and this was, at least, a lead that promised results, however minor.

Not as minor as I thought, as it turned out.

I'd only been to Catherine's a few times so far and it felt funny to be there by myself again. It took me a moment or two to get acclimated; all I could think about was the last time I'd been there. I'd been kneeling on the floor with a near-dead woman in my arms, a woman I thought I was in love with. It was a spooky feeling. Especially when I thought how I was there this time at least partly because I was suspicious of her and wanted to sneak a look into her private belongings.

As if being watched, however, I didn't launch my inspection right away. Instead, I went and stared at her collection of crystals, wondering what in the world she'd expected me to do with them. They sat in a pile by a small wooden box that had a wooden grid set in it. A few crystals had already been placed in

this grid. I'd noticed a poster on the wall about crystal formations; it seemed to match this grid, but when I tried to imitate the patterns nothing happened.

I stared hard at the crystals poster, trying to discern if I'd gotten the patterns right.

But then it occurred to me that this was too easy. It wouldn't be much of a secret if the answer was written on the wall. But what, then? It was frustrating. I was sure Catherine's message would give me some clue as to who had attacked her, or why, at least. And her note made it clear that her meaning was somehow hidden in those crystals. Yet I couldn't figure out how.

Growing more and more frustrated, I scanned the poster up and down until I was just about ready to give up. I pressed my burning eyes closed, rubbed them, then tried to refocus on the patterns on the poster. It was then that I realized I was staring at the wrong poster—I'd come out of my short respite to find myself staring at another of her pseudo-mystical posters, this one showing the twelve signs of the zodiac. It was an easy mistake to make—the constellations suggested patterns that looked very similar to those of the crystals poster.

Then it hit me—had Catherine planted a red herring by making me think her secret was hidden in the crystals poster? Was the correct answer hidden, instead, on the zodiac poster? I stared closer, counting stars, trying to figure which constellation might work. All the while I mumbled to myself, wondering what the hell she saw in all this nonsense—all the constellations and crystals and patterns had my head swimming.

Chapter 9

I pressed my eyes closed once more, opened them, and saw nothing but a mess of stars. I examined other posters, but saw nothing that struck me as a clue until I caught sight of a birthday card on the mantel—the one I'd sent her myself on her last birthday, in February. Birthdays, signs of the zodiac—those things were connected, weren't they?

I went to it quickly, picked it up, and stared at the date: February 25. I went back to the poster, coordinated the date to a sign, and discerned that Catherine was a Pisces. I looked at the constellation for Pisces, then went to the crystals and arranged them in the same formation.

Suddenly, a laser light filled the box and zigzagged from one crystal to another, then shot off, straight as an arrow in flight, across the room, where it spotlighted the spine of a book on the bookshelf. I raced over to the book and read the title: "Horoscope."

And then it came to me. I looked from the title to the desk. Her computer seemed to loom there, just waiting for me. Could this title be a password to a file she wanted me to read? Or, better than that, could it be the password to a secret WELL she maintained? I was suddenly sure that it was. The problem, however, was that Catherine's home computer had no decking port. I'd have to go back to the newsroom.

And now I was all the more eager, as well, to check out a few of the other leads Catherine had left behind, especially the ones she'd left inadvertently. Some of the names I'd seen on her Rolodex, for example, like Soap Beatty.

I was nearly out the door when something leaning against the coat rack caught my eye. It was a cane, a very fancy little walking stick with a heavy brass knob on one end. It looked like a valuable piece, antique and expensive. I noticed it had an engraving on the handle: "J. Dorsett." Not a name I remembered Catherine ever mentioning.

At that moment I noticed the button concealed on the handle. I've seen some weird weapons in my time as a crime reporter, and I knew the significance of that button immediately: What I was holding was no antique. What I was holding was a laser cane. Press the button and it would emit laser blasts from the tip. I picked it up and held it like a rifle, looking down the shaft as though I were lining up a shot. It had polished brass and silver handiwork that caught the available light and glittered. It was pretty. Dapper, delicate, and deadly. What in the world was Catherine doing with this?

Then I felt a chill as I realized that it was the sort of thing a Victorian gentleman would have carried—that it was the sort of thing Jack the-Ripper himself probably carried, when he wasn't wielding a knife. I looked at the button and thought how he didn't need a knife if he'd had this thing. Then I remembered they hadn't discovered what weapon his copycat used yet, after all.

I let the cane fall from my hands like a hot rock and stared at it as it rolled to rest on the floor at my feet. I backed away and got the hell out of there.

Chapter 10

VIRTUAL SHOOT-OUT

I made tracks for the newsroom, then slid into cyberspace. I found that Catherine did indeed have a secret WELL, and "Horoscope" was the open sesame.

I'd just gotten over the wave of nausea when I found myself slowing down, as if coming in for a landing, hoving into a weird, cyber-landscape of electric reds and blues beneath a vacant virtual sky. The next thing I knew, I felt myself being electronically repulsed; I resisted and in an instant, standing there before me was Detective Vince Magnotta.

"I am Detective Vincent Magnotta of the New York City Allied Police Forces, Soho Corps," he announced. "This is a restricted crime scene. You must leave the area immediately. This will be your only warning."

I knew instantly that this was a recording—an AI, not Magnotta's actual presence in the form of an angel, although the phrase "Magnotta's angel" sounded like an oxymoron. But it was an AI that came with a powerful application; the next thing I knew, the feeling of electronic repulsion sent me reeling backwards, and then I saw a bizarre, truncated cop robot with four arms blazing fire—it looked as though a law enforcement

amputee, slicing through the sky on a saucer of fire, was suddenly swooping down on me. I ducked just in time, realized this was some kind of combat ICE I'd never seen before, and scrambled for position. Normally, the ICE people use to protect their WELLs takes the form of a puzzle, or some kind of encryption code. But this, I could see, was going to escalate into all-out combat, an old-fashioned shoot-out, like cops and robbers, except this time the robber—me—was the good guy, and the cop was the bad guy.

I tried to take aim, but I suddenly realized this was much more sophisticated ICE than I would have expected from the loutish Magnotta. There was no denying this robot represented some high-tech programming of his own devising—the city would have never paid for such state-of-the-art ICE. The thing was fast and slippery, able to stop on a dime and then instantly accelerate to near-blinding speeds. I was further confused by the fiery shooters the robot held in each hand. And every time it got close, I could feel the strength of its repulsion field throbbing. My own shields just barely deflected it, and I knew they wouldn't hold for long.

But I was damned if I was going to let the thing boot me out. Catherine had left something for me here, and I meant to claim it.

I spotted a throbbing orb of some sort on the robot's forehead, and I blasted away at it. This seemed to deflect the thing, but it didn't seem to weaken it any. As soon as I let up, it swooped down on me immediately and it took all my efforts to ward it off with my shield. I knew it was just a question of minutes before it booted me out, and probably painfully.

In a reflex move, I landed a lucky shot in the thing's jet stream as it zipped toward me. It turned out to be a luckier shot than I realized—the thing staggered, then reeled in midair. I unloaded on the jets beneath it and sent it reeling again. It

actually tumbled, and when it did, I saw the power pack on its back. I blasted it with all I had, and the thing exploded.

I stayed low, searching the reddened sky for more, but Magnotta had apparently been so confident about his invention that he hadn't seen fit to post reinforcements.

The coast was clear, so far as I could tell, but I decided not to hang around. I commenced a quick search, but hadn't gone two steps when the air in the WELL itself seemed to grab me—the WELL application had locked onto my angel. Catherine, apparently, was herself a coder of some impressive skill. The next thing I knew, her WELL had downloaded something into my database.

I didn't wait around to see if there was more. I booted out of there, headed back to the newsroom, already determined to stick with real-world leads for a while.

Chapter 11

I GET TOUGH WITH A GUY IN A WHEELCHAIR, THEN A REAL OLD GUY

IT was a pleasure to be back in a cab, although I was getting pretty goddamn crabby. The shoot-out in Catherine's WELL had done nothing for my jangling nerves, nor had what I'd found in my database when I'd gotten back to the newsroom: It was Catherine's electronic journal, which should have made me happy, should have provided me with clear and explicit insight into what she was up to. Only thing was, it was encrypted—by Magnotta, I figured—which meant that whatever was in there was just another thing he was keeping from me. I'd have to find a way to unscramble it, which meant I had one more vague lead to follow. And the more I thought about the slew of leads I had, the more they weighed on me, until I lurched forward in my seat and scared the bejeezus out of the driver by shouting, "Turn here!"

And I wonder why taxi drivers always seem to be afraid of me.

I'd been headed uptown to check out my lead on the Wofford murder when I suddenly remembered Soap Beatty, the guy I'd seen on Catherine's Rolodex. This memory once again

summoned my suspicions of Catherine. What in the world had she been up to, dealing with some shady smoke-shop operator? Anyway, the address I'd lifted from the Rolodex wasn't too far off, so I redirected the cabbie.

When we got to the smoke shop, I saw that it wasn't such a seedy place after all, which only intrigued me all the more. I was glad to see a light burning in the back of the shop. I'd lost all track of time. It was long past closing time for the average shopkeeper, even in the Village. But as I was about to find out, Soap Beatty was no ordinary shopkeeper.

I knocked on the plate-glass window and peered in, trying to see over the racks and display cases to the shining doorway in the back of the store.

Then I experienced a fright that nearly sent me running: I saw a head floating through the store. It wasn't until it rolled up to the window that I realized it was connected to an entire body—a guy in a wheelchair. With the display cases in the way, all I'd been able to see was his head.

I mouthed, "I'm here about Catherine Powell" to him through the plate glass, and he nodded and rolled to the door to let me in.

"You must be Quinlan," he said. "I been wondering when you'd get here. I told Catherine she was getting too close to that maniac."

I surveyed the room; it seemed to be more than just a run-of-the-mill smoke shop—there were some odd antique and high-tech doodads tucked in amongst the stogies, and a rack of expensive technological books and computer magazines. His

greeting yanked my attention back to him. He was a tough-looking customer, lean and mean despite his confinement to that chair—which, I now noticed, was equipped with its share of high-tech refinements. The guy, I took it, was some kind of heavy-duty computer aficionado.

"What was Catherine coming to see you about?" I asked him.

He laughed. I guess I was being a little aggressive, and he misread what I was hot about.

"Take it easy, pal," he said. "I don't get that kind of action no more. I was just a source for the woman—of information, that is, not inspiration, if you get my drift."

But I didn't, exactly, get his drift. I repeated the question.

"I did what I do," he said cheerfully. "A little electronic B&E, a little help finding stuff on the net, a little gettin' past security systems. Hell, she even had me do a little handwriting analysis. I got some unusual specialties, you might say. Also, I gave her some good smoke."

"Catherine doesn't smoke," I told him.

He just raised his eyebrows and smiled.

It was an embarrassing moment. All right, so I clearly didn't know everything about the woman I'd been sleeping with for the last couple of months. But at least this guy seemed like he wasn't going to rub my face in it.

"How come she never told me about you?" I asked him.

"Your lady … " he began; then he shrugged. "She seemed like a chick who liked her secrets."

It didn't take too many questions to find out that Soap Beatty

was, indeed, a computer expert—not just on hardware and software, but on the business in general, and especially on how to get around in cyberspace without leaving any footprints. As he explained it, "Out here in the real world, I'm stuck in this chair, man. But in there, I can *dance*, brother!"

I pressed him about what, exactly, he'd been investigating for Catherine. It was the simplest answer he gave me. "She was trying to make a connection between the Ripper's victims."

"But according to the police, there were no connections," I protested. "One ran a laundromat, one was a book editor—"

Beatty just shrugged.

The long and the short of it was that he'd just given Catherine some hacking and surveillance advice, suggestions on how to beat some particular brand of ICE, and stuff like that. He couldn't tell me whose ICE, in particular, she was concerned with, nor what she might be trying to hack into, nor whom she might be planning to bug. He said she never told him exactly what she was up to, she just asked for advice on methods and technology.

If he knew more, he wasn't spilling it, no matter how much I tried to bully him, which wasn't much—he was helpful enough, and I had the feeling he would be handy to know. Plus, something about him told me he could probably handle himself pretty well, wheelchair or no.

By the time I'd finished grilling him on Catherine, his business, and his areas of expertise, I felt like we were old army buddies. Of course, given the appearance of the two of us, it would have had to have been a pretty mangy army.

In any case, by the time I was leaving, he had me promising to keep him posted on Catherine's condition. His concern seemed genuine. At the same time, though, as I was leaving, he advised me to keep an eye on her.

"But—she's in a coma," I said.

"That ought to make it easier to watch her, then," he pointed out.

As I got back in the cab and directed the driver to take me up to the Wofford place in Central Park, the sense of frustration I felt at having to investigate my own girlfriend returned to me. I hadn't really learned anything from Soap Beatty, it seemed, except that Catherine's efforts had been much more involved than I'd suspected. Electronic surveillance devices? ICE? Handwriting analysis?

I guess I still wasn't ready to admit, that she'd been trying to do anything more than run down her own angle on the Ripper story. And, as sneaky as this was, I had to admit that I'd tried the same stuff when I was a rookie. That's the kind of aggression that gets you noticed in a newsroom. It doesn't make you very popular with the other reporters—I was living proof of that—but it does get you to the top, sooner or later. So, despite the mounting evidence to the contrary, I decided I had to cut the woman some slack, stop seeing something suspicious in her each and every action.

In any case, by the time I arrived in the dark midsection of Manhattan, the shadowy region that used to be a public greenery known as Central Park, I was ready to take my investigation in another direction. I wanted to see the house where the murder of Hamilton Wofford had taken place. If it was a Ripper murder, it was the only one that hadn't taken place in the Village, which meant that, like Catherine's attack, this incident represented a break in the Ripper's m.o. Beyond that, God knows what I expected to find in the house of a dead man.

What I found was something I was unprepared for—there was a light on. It seems Hamilton Wofford didn't live alone. This was good. It meant there could be some witnesses to talk to. The place was a quaint little cottage that looked like something Hansel and

Gretel should have lived in. This was good, too. I was getting tired of dealing with underground types. But when I knocked on the door, got no answer, and let myself in, an old geezer came at me with a broom. This wasn't working out so well.

"Beware! Beware! I've got a weapon!" he was hollering.

It took me a while to calm him down, but once I did, I found out he was Hamilton Wofford's twin brother, Covington. He was the one who'd found his brother. "I just thought he was sleeping," he explained.

I cut him some slack then. If I'd found my brother shot to death in my house, I'd be walking around the house with worse than a broom.

Not to say that Covington Wofford was in need of a shoulder to cry on. He was a spunky old codger. When I threw a few questions about the police investigation at him, he got all fired up again.

"The police—bah!" he yelled. "They were in on it, I tell you!"

"What makes you think that?" I asked.

"The way they rooted through Hamilton's things, trying to get his WELL address out of me—but they got nothing out of me!"

"Was it a guy named Magnotta?" I tried.

"Yes, that—that—"

I told him I understood; they hadn't invented the proper word yet.

The old guy calmed down a little, though, once he got these complaints out of his system. As it turned out, he knew who I was; apparently he and his brother followed my Ripper reporting.

Chapter 11

"Hamilton would read your stories every morning at breakfast, and then he wouldn't want to go to work, like he was, like … oh … " Covington's voice drifted off. I was beginning to understand that other parts of him seemed to have drifted off, as well. He was lively, but a bit discombobulated. Who knows? Maybe his brother got all the brains, and he got all the personality. Either way, I liked him, and was sorry to have to question him about his brother's death.

"Well, what was your brother working on?" I asked. I wanted to explore the Ripper connection without unduly alarming the old codger; it was hard to know if he suspected this or not.

And it didn't get any easier. He went on for a while about his brother's genius as a cyber-architect, about the virtual worlds he built, especially those based on historic settings. "You can walk through them in cyberspace and swear they were real," he said. "It's like walking through the corridors of time itself!"

"What was his last job?"

"Oh, it was a secret," Covington responded. "He never told, not even me. All he told me was the research was strange. Said he spent the entire day in an English music hall, once. That's all I know."

"Well, do you know *who* he was working for?"

Covington just shook his head sadly. I could see he was still very greatly affected; it had only been a month. This was one of those times when I hated my job. But it *was* my job, and more lives were at stake. I had to be firm.

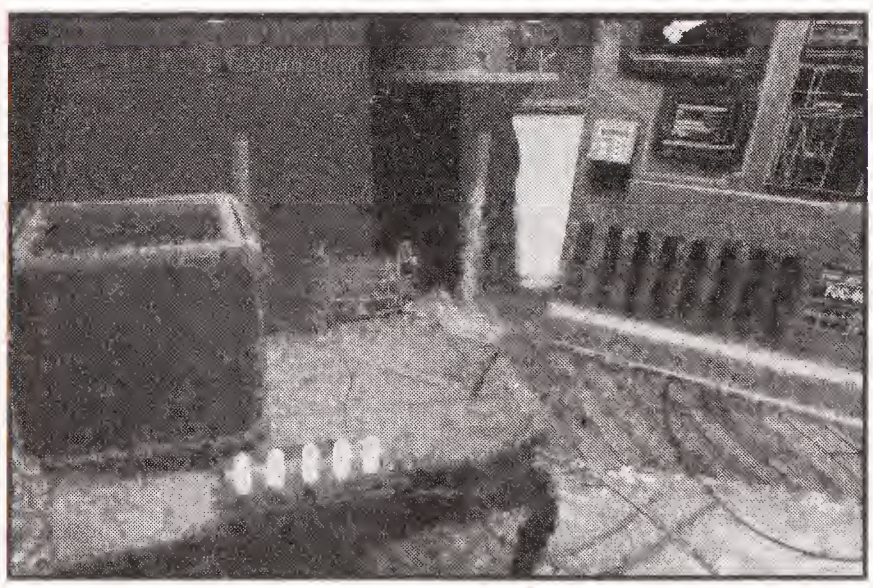
I asked him if there wasn't some way we could find out what his brother had been building when he was murdered. Some records someplace?

"Oh, I'm not going to tell you about the secret hiding places," he said, shaking his head vociferously. "I promised Hamilton: 'Mum's the word.' "

My ears perked up, of course, and I was beginning to see how to work things out of the old guy, as much as I hated to manipulate him. In short order, I'd gotten it out of him that Hamilton had concealed the address to his WELL in bits and pieces all over the house. "Secret compartments," muttered Covington. "Devices and concealments!"

I convinced him to help me, having become convinced myself that Hamilton Wofford must have left something behind that might give us some clue as to who had killed him. If it was related to his last project, there had to be some record of who had hired him. And as he was a cyber-architect, dealing with cyber-worlds, maybe that was where he maintained his records—in a cyber-office.

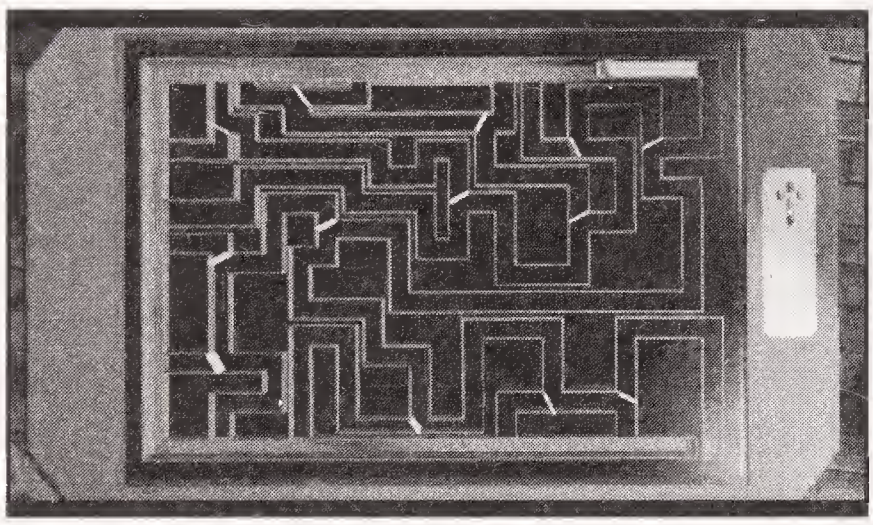
Mumbling uncertainly, Covington led me to a nearby table and showed me an old-fashioned socket board and picture tube. Two of the sockets had vacuum tubes in them, but the other three slots were empty. "We need those," he explained. I studied the room, but there were no more vacuum tubes anywhere to be found. It was actually a pretty neat work space, with minimal clutter. All that stood out was this socket board setup and a wall-sized computer with a decking port.



Just then I was distracted from studying the room any further by Covington's sudden change in demeanor. "Not here, not here," he muttered repeatedly.

He seemed to have lapsed into a daze. No matter how firm I was with him, I couldn't help him snap out of it. Switching to gentle pleading didn't work, either. I was on my own.

I went into the next room to search for the tubes. I found myself in the living room, and it was chock-full of things that looked to me like they might contain "concealments and devices." For example, there was an old glass-topped table. When I came near it, I saw that the table was actually some kind of game involving ball bearings, a maze, and chutes on swivels. Having a knack for board games, I decided to give it a try.



It was simply a question of positioning the chutes so the ball could roll from the top of the board to the hole in the bottom. Don't think, I told myself as I activated the table. When it comes to games, thinking too much can screw you up sometimes.

First, I scanned the board and thought I noticed a pattern. The controls for the chutes were on the side of the machine. I punched in 5, 1, and 3. The ball progressed halfway through the maze, then stopped. The next pattern seemed clear to me: 4, 1, 5. It worked. I was almost home. I tried 3, 4, and 5, and the ball completed its course. There's a lot to be said for the non-thinking approach.

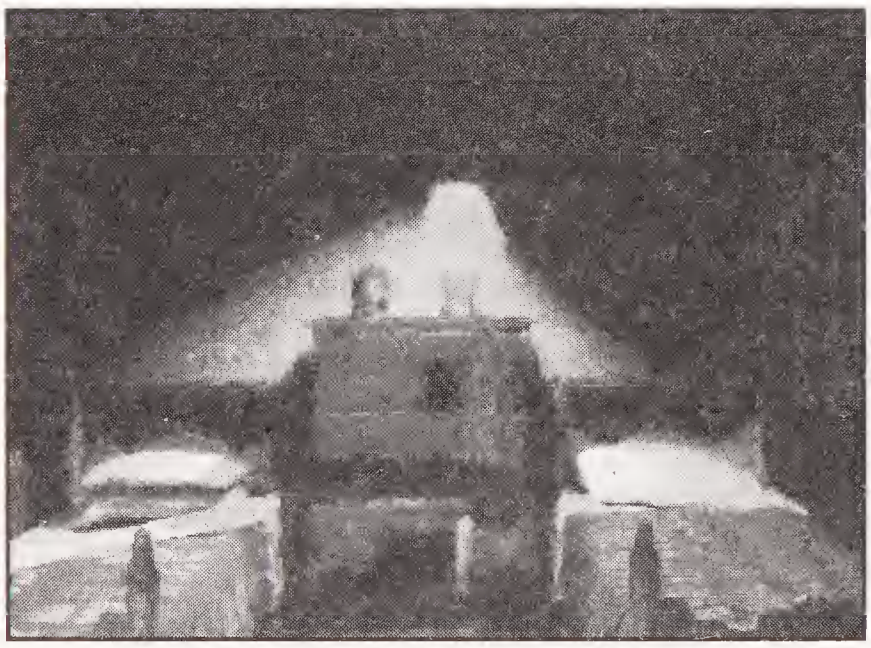
I was so pleased with myself that I almost missed the drawer that opened automatically and presented me with the first vacuum tube.

So far, so good. Maybe Hamilton wasn't such a DaVinci after all.

I studied the room, but saw nothing else as obvious as a board game. In fact, the only thing that really stood out was a beautiful wall map showing the time zones of the world, and a spot where three clocks had been positioned on a nearby wall. It sure looked like a puzzle, but nothing came to me immediately. I decided to check out the rest of the house first, and started up

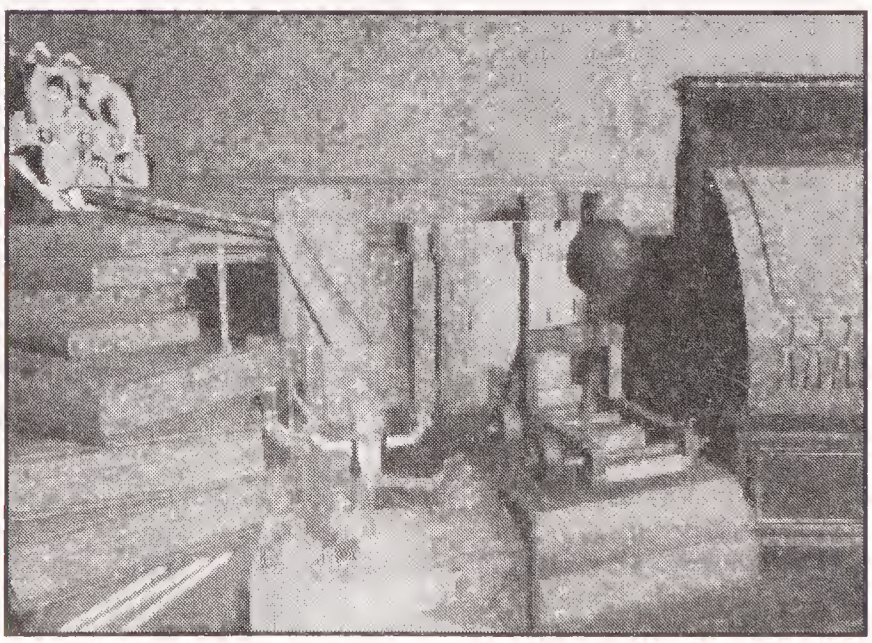
the stairway that wrapped down into the room, passing, as I did so, a plaque commemorating Hamilton's first patent award. I guess he really was a smarty-pants.

At the top of the stairs, I discovered there was only one other room to examine, and that was the bedroom. There, a couple things caught my eye. One was yet another clock—this one dismantled, but functioning nonetheless; it was flashing "2:35" over and over and over.



I couldn't imagine the addled Covington engaging in clock repair. Yet if it had been Hamilton who had been working on it, why wasn't it finished? Clearly, both these guys were neatniks and wouldn't leave it around if they didn't have to. And Hamilton was supposed to be a genius. Wouldn't a genius know how to fix a simple clock?

A genius *would* know how to fix a clock. It was a message. I had an idea about the clocks in the living room. Before I could leave the room, though, I noticed something else: what looked like a toy castle and accompanying catapult ... which was next to a tin toy cowboy ... which was connected to a cash register ... which was connected to a coin changer by a little slide. This had to be one of Hamilton's hiding places. Cowboys and castles just didn't go together.



Chapter 11

Whatever this was supposed to be, I could see it was pretty involved. When I tinkered with the coin changer, a coin rolled down the chute into the cowboy's waiting hands. Then the cowboy sort of slid along a little track to the catapult, where he dumped the coin, which was then launched—via a concealed, spring-loaded device—into the castle. It was a neat operation, worthy of a great inventor—worthy of its own patent.

Which is when a thought came to me.

I went back down to the patent plaque and stared at the numbers: P2X255127.5A. I stared at it until I saw the formula: *2 times* the rest of it. I multiplied it out and got 510,255.

I went back to the coin changer and flicked in four coins in succession—a nickel, then a dime, then a quarter, then another nickel. One by one, the cowboy dumped them, the catapult tossed them, and they rattled home inside the castle.

And then, after the fourth one landed within the castle walls and I heard it roll to rest, the drawer of the cash register popped open and I had vacuum tube number two.

That left the clocks, which I was sure comprised the final puzzle. I took a final look at the dismantled alarm clock flashing 2:35, then returned to the living room and set all the clocks for the same time. Nothing happened.

I looked around the room, scratching my head ... until my eyes fell on the time-zone map.

"Bingo," I said aloud.

"No, we don't have that," I heard Covington call from the next room.

I hollered for him to hold on a minute and I approached the map. I stared from it to the

clocks and back again. It took me a while, but it came to me after I considered the nature of the clocks for a moment: one was a German cuckoo clock, one was embedded in a model of an Egyptian pyramid, and the third was a U.S. Army clock.

I went back and reset the clocks according to their time zones: the army clock at 14:35, army time for 2:35; then the Egyptian clock at 9:35, then the German clock at 8:35. It all added up to time for another vacuum tube.

Covington watched me closely when I rejoined him in his brother's studio and began plugging the tubes into the socket board.

With a crackling charge of static electricity the picture tube whirred to life, and there, at last, hovering on the screen like a vision from an archaic age, was the password to Hamilton Wofford's c-space WELL: "Vulcan."

I was already headed to the decking port on Hamilton's wall computer.

Once again, however, I took an exciting lead and ran with it, only to discover that it was what grade-school teachers call *knowledge*. You know, that stuff you're supposed to retain because it might come in handy later in life. Much later. Like, conceivably, the way things were going to be after I was dead.

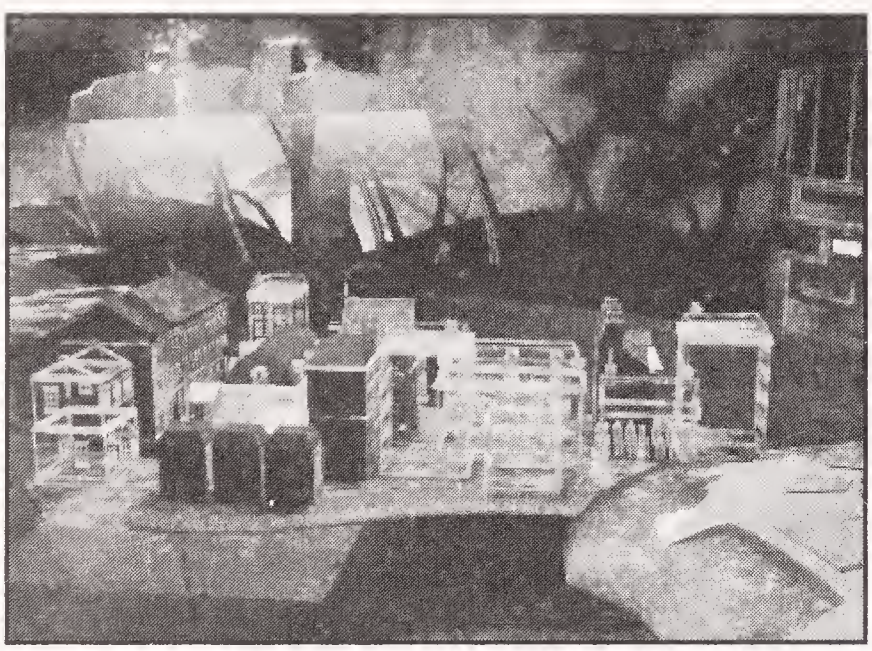
I never liked grade-school.

What happened was this: I got into Hamilton Wofford's WELL and found all kinds of cool and groovy stuff that helped me not a wit. I didn't find any special message from Hamilton to his brother, nor did I find any records indicating what he'd been working on, nor anything telling me whom he'd been working for.

Once I got over the shock of disappointment, however, I did find some stuff I could tell was relevant to the Ripper case. The only problem was, it was relevant to the wrong Ripper case—at best, it was relevant to the *original* Jack the Ripper case.

Chapter 11

What I found was a virtual workshop that was a combination lab and library. The place was littered with virtual books that all seemed to constitute reference material for a project on Victorian England. There were the books, there were pictures, there were maps, all pertaining to England in general, and London in particular, during the late nineteenth century.



Covington had told me that Hamilton specialized in historical constructions, and it sure looked like the recently departed had been deep in research on some project that had to do with a model of London. Taking my slow survey deeper into the chamber, I found out conclusively that this was true, for there, sprawling over a wide piece of plywood propped up on sawhorses, was a model of the city. It was a remarkable sight, detailed to the nth degree, down to the mortar between the red bricks of the buildings, the unevenness of the cobblestone streets, and the cracks in the sidewalks.

It looked like London to me, anyway, or at least a part of it. I didn't see Big Ben anywhere, so I couldn't be sure, because I only knew London from postcards of Big Ben—my life as a foreign correspondent hadn't progressed beyond a drunken stay in Pamplona, from which I'd demanded immediate reassignment home when I found out they let bulls run wild through the streets. I'd never made it to London. But, based on the reference material and the look of the place, it seemed like a safe bet that this was the London of the late Victorian period, the 1890s or so, and I knew enough about the original Ripper to know that that's when he'd terrorized the city.

So, I figured out that much. So now what?

Beginning to feel my exhaustion, I booted out and gave Covington the disappointing news.

After all we'd gone through with the puzzles, it seemed like there should have been more, but if there was, I wasn't up to digging anymore just then. I was beat, and I still had one more lead I wanted to run down before I let myself crash into sleep.

I bid the sweet old man good night, and left him wandering through his own house like a ghost. He begged me to come back and visit him sometime, and I told him I would. Actually, I told him more than that. I told him I'd try to help him solve his brother's murder, because he didn't trust the police and was convinced they were hiding something. I didn't have the heart to tell him that they'd already closed the investigation—or at least that's what I surmised from the "Case Closed" stamp on the stolen file I'd seen in Magnotta's office. But Magnotta, at least, seemed to think some aspect of the case still lived. And now I did, too.

For now, though, I merely told Covington I'd do what I could, then I quietly shut the door behind me ... and slapped myself on the forehead for telling him that. As if I didn't have enough to take care of already.

Just the thought of it all got me in motion, though, on what I saw as my last lead of the day ... or week, or however long it had been since Catherine tumbled into my arms and out of human consciousness. It was still dark out, that's all I knew.

Chapter 12

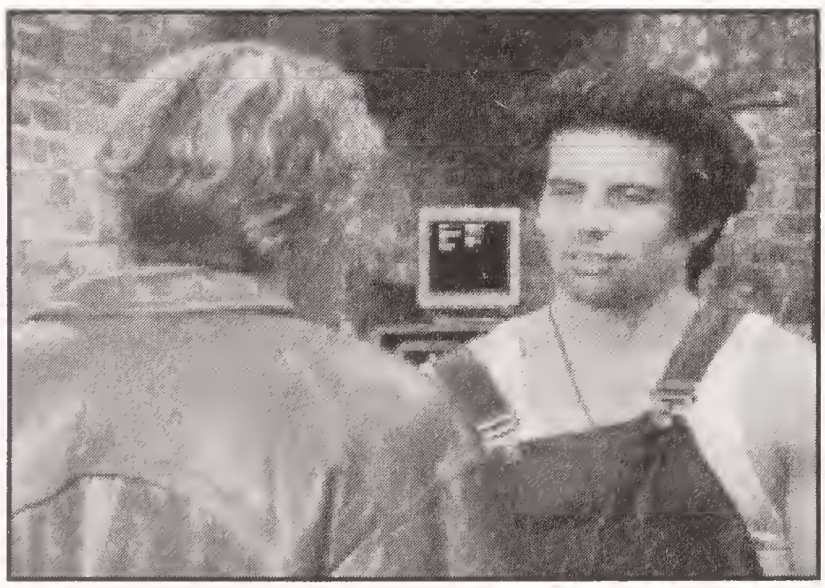
ANGEL WITH A KNIFE

BY the time I got out to Hoboken it was well past my deadline and my ears were buzzing; somewhere, Ben Dodds was cursing me out. I told myself he'd thank me when he heard about the Falconetti development—assuming there would be a Falconetti development—and I made my way to the front door of the seedy little house located at the address I'd gotten from Gambit.

Hoboken: city of light, city of magic.

The door nearly fell off the hinges when I knocked, swinging wide open to reveal an even seedier interior of splintered wood, cracked bricks, and a protective layer of dust.

Twig, the guy Gambit had said owned the place, turned out to be a full-fledged weirdo. He was practicing some kind of strange martial arts dance with his own shadow when I came in. It was some bizarre stuff—the shadow was bright green, like he was practicing by the light of a glow lamp.



But when he interrupted his workout to take a look at me, I noticed the shadow wasn't really a shadow; it emanated from his computer. He'd programmed a practice partner for himself.

"Cute," I said.

"You must be Jake Quinlan," he replied. "Gambit called ahead. Strange. Dr. Burton usually sends Dr. Cable whenever she needs the Falcon."

At least I had the right place. I decided to take it slow with this character. If he was supposed to be the muscleman for a famous outlaw, he must be dangerous, although he didn't look it. But you never know with these wimpy-looking martial arts guys. They look easy to take, then you start to tussle with them and they kick you so hard your whole family feels the pain.

I started with some backgrounders about his boss, hoping to get some idea of who I was dealing with. On the verge of finally meeting Falconetti, I suddenly felt under-informed about anything but the guy's potential to do me harm.

"Is he as good as I've heard?" I inquired.

"The best," Twig replied. "He can deck for days straight and keep sharp. 'Course, it doesn't hurt that he's got me cooking for him."

My senses went on red alert. Cooking? Did this mean Falconetti was near at hand? But Twig meant a different kind of cooking.

"Hey, even an archangel like the Falcon needs medication," he said. "Extended decking's hard on the nervous system. Also on nutrition. Also on the tuckus."

Twig was more forthcoming than I'd expected. Plus, he seemed to think Burton had sent me. I let this one ride, figuring it was a better cover than admitting I was a reporter. Criminals on the run are usually opposed to talking to reporters.

But when it came time to give up Falconetti's actual whereabouts, Twig got coy.

I asked him nicely.

He wouldn't give it up.

I complimented him on the shadow trick.

He thanked me.

I asked again, trying to be a little more persuasive. I mentioned the possibility of the police getting an anonymous tip about this quaint location in scenic Hoboken. I think I dropped the name of my good friend, Detective Vince Magnotta.

Funny, the warm feeling Magnotta's name seemed to summon up in people.

Twig gave up the address right away.

"He's in a WELL called Circus Maximus," he said. "And I'd suggest a different approach when you talk to him." Falconetti, it seemed, had an averse reaction to the mere mention of Magnotta. As I say, funny, the warm feeling etc.

Twig was already back at it with his fake shadow. Apparently, our conversation was over.

I was momentarily annoyed to have come all the way to Hoboken just to get the password to a WELL. I'd been hoping to meet Falconetti in person. But, clearly, Twig wasn't about to give up his actual location, and I'd have to go all the way back to the newsroom to deck into c-space just for a chance to catch a minute of his employer's time … possibly, if I was lucky.

I didn't feel very lucky. I was getting runaround after runaround. I pursued lead after lead, and where did it get me? To a place where the shadows moved by themselves, as if I was in cyberspace already. But I wasn't in cyberspace. I didn't feel like I was in reality, either. I'd been chasing my own tail all night long, and where was I?

In Hoboken. But not for long.

It took me a little while to flag a cab out there in the hinterlands, but once I did, I found it easy to inspire the driver to get me back to the Apple in record time—a few choice cracks about his hometown and he had the pedal to the metal, eager to be rid of his crabby fare. Mission accomplished, I settled back in my seat and wondered if this was all going to be worth it. Would

Falconetti be all he was cracked up to be? I mean, if he was such an incredibly successful outlaw hacker, how did that explain his anemic factotum and his seedy digs? Judging by that, anyway, my first impression was that he was overrated.

Of course, a good reporter should know that first impressions are often deceiving. I was reminded of this about ten seconds after I plugged in the WELL address Twig had coughed up, and I was on my way to Circus Maximus.

At first, it was an exhilarating roller-coaster ride—lambent, colorful, with cheerful calliope noises the closer I got. I felt the prickling sensation on my forearms as I stared down at my hands and then took in the vision of my own data angel—cyber-me—and a first-person point of view at the same time; it was, as ever, like walking around with your own mental meanderings, viewing your own subconscious imaginings.

Except I also felt the slight rush of nausea as I entered the portal to the WELL, and it wasn't going away like it usually did; in fact, it got worse, then worse than that. I was speeding, out of control, in a bright and terrifying free fall.

And then I was there. But where? I seemed to have stopped, but I was still spinning. I couldn't focus, it felt like a wicked wind was blowing against me, strong as the force of gravity, and then everything jerked to a halt.

I was spread-eagle, my limbs tied up, and a midget clown stood before me, grinning like a bandito. He was holding a handful of very large knives.

"Looking for Falconetti?" he asked pleasantly.

"Yeah," I gulped, trying to catch my virtual breath. "Where the hell am I?"

"Oh," he said, as if pleased to be asked. "You're in a forty gigabyte virtual environment I invented myself. A circus. Impressive, huh?"

Chapter 12

He was smiling. His knives seemed to make him happy. He stroked one. I agreed it was a nice place.

"Good," he said. "I'm Falconetti."

"You?" I was surprised. I guess I'd expected someone taller, leaner, maybe wearing cheap leather. With a permanent smirk. This guy was smiling like an angel. Then his skull was smiling like an angel.

Before I knew it, the circus behind him seemed to morph into fire, and it lunged at me. I pulled back, only to find that I was bound tight to a splintered wooden surface. "What the—" I started, but then I found out why the wood was splintered: A knife suddenly appeared between the fingers of my right hand. I looked out at the smiling skull and saw that the skull was gone, and so was the smile; Falconetti's face was back, and it had settled into a grim expression. Everything behind him was a mad, fiery swirl, like the landscape of Hades.

The next knife landed so close to my ear I could feel the coolness of the blade. "Who … " Falconetti began, winging a knife at my other ear "…the hell … " a knife landing near the top of my head gave a whole new definition to the term *split ends* "…sent you?" I looked down to see the last knife sticking out just beneath the family jewels.

I yanked hard on my hands, tried to kick my feet, but it was as if I were glued to the wheel. I could see Falconetti winding up to chuck another knife at me.

"Farley!" I screamed. "Vic Farley sent me!"

He didn't believe me. The knife landed close enough to my

shoulder to slice the fabric of my shirt.

"Nah," he said. "Clare sent you, right?"

I couldn't get away. I'd told him the truth, and he didn't believe me. I hollered something about Catherine—more truth—told him I had a friend in trouble whom only he could help. He kept yammering about Clare Burton.

"I love showing her up," he muttered.

It was when I mentioned that Catherine had been attacked by the Ripper that he seemed to grow calm.

"The Ripper?" he mused. "He's even better with knives than I am . . . ." He had a dreamy expression on his face, as if the Ripper were the most fascinating thing in human history, as if there was nothing repulsive about him at all.

"I'll tell you what," he said after a moment's thought. I noticed his lazy smile was back. "You show me what you're worth in cyberspace, and if you can handle yourself, I'll consider helping your girlfriend."

I didn't know what he was talking about, but I was free and glad of it, rubbing my wrists and nodding my head in agreement with whatever he said.

Then, all of a sudden, I was flying, zooming back into cyberspace, and it was getting dark. "Shoot a bad guy, get a point," I heard Falconetti's voice echo all around me. It sounded as if I were falling down a deep, deep well. "Shoot a good guy, lose some points. Beat my high score, we talk."

I could have run then; I sensed I'd been released from his control for a moment, that I had the power to deck out. But I

decided to go with it, for some mad reason. I'd gone through a lot just to get there. And I really did need his help.

Then the darkness faded and suddenly I was in a desolate, post-apocalyptic urban environment capped by a singed sky. I walked forward slowly over broken cobblestones, ready for anything, just hoping that whatever it turned out to be, it wasn't knives protruding in close proximity to the little fireman.

Which is the sort of worry that can preoccupy a man, so I'd already taken a few, tentative steps before I realized there was a strange weight pulling on my right arm. I looked down to see that the right hand of my data angel had been empowered with some kind of weaponry; I knew that if I just pointed my hand I could release some kind of projective force. The only problem was I was left-handed.

Still, I began to feel somewhat at ease when I realized that my angel was armed, and in more ways than one. See, there are only two things in life that I take to naturally, with a certain amount of cocky skill. One of them was something Catherine taught me that I don't want to get into here. The other was guns. I wasn't brought up hunting or anything. I owned a weapon, though, a little snub-nosed thing that I used to carry around for protection. The only thing is, I'd never actually fired it. Then one day Lou Brannon took me down to the target range at the police academy and handed me his pistol. I hefted the weapon—it had a barrel on it about the circumference of my thigh—and I kind of jokingly pointed it at the furthest target. I put the eye out of the silhouette criminal without even thinking about it. Brannon snorted and told me to do it again. I took out the other eye, then each nostril, before I started thinking about it so much as to kill off the knack. I hit most of the targets after that, including an old woman with a walker. I was still pretty good—a "natural," as Brannon begrudgingly put it—but I was a killer when I didn't think too hard.

I was thinking about it now, though, going into a contest with a guy like Falconetti. I'd be lucky to match his score, let alone beat him. Still, I was willing to take my chances. It's not like I had a choice in the matter, anyway.

Nor, as it turned out, did I have the opportunity for extended meditation: Before I had the chance to investigate the location any further, I was suddenly in motion—peeling, pell-mell, over the dirt and rubble and into the heart of that wasted cityscape. I zoomed down a thin, garbage-strewn street going hell-bent for leather toward a brick wall; in the instant before crashing, I was jerked away, and veered down another street, where a skeletal figure draped only in shreds suddenly burst forth from the cobblestones practically beneath my feet. I shot reflexively, heard a resounding *clang*! as if I'd shot a duck in an arcade, then glimpsed the figure slipping back beneath the rubble as I careened onward.

I was racing toward another wall when another desiccated figure suddenly loomed before me; I fired just as I veered off in another direction. I heard the clang but there was no time to look back—I was speeding toward the burnt-out shell of a wrecked automobile. The form of a huddled woman suddenly lifted from behind it, and I checked my reflex to shoot her only at the last instant. She looked closer to human, and as I twisted away from collision I realized that I'd decided on a method: shoot at the inhuman, spare the subhuman, and do it all reflexively.

Those reflexes, however, were sorely tested as I was propelled around the perimeter of a bombed-out square, with ragged figures popping up more and more steadily from invisible fissures and jagged masonry. I was in the target range of the police academy from hell. Figures appeared in doorways, around corners, from overhead and from out of nowhere, and I did my best to wend my way through them,

clanging my way forward until I was yanked toward a dented steel door and on into what seemed a giant furnace room. The monstrous and the tortured alternated even faster there, with forlorn people cowering in corners or materializing in front of me to hover like sad zombies, while fiends draped in chains dropped from the rafters or sprang forth with a screech or a witch's cackle. I pulled shots and released them until I'd navigated the room, and then I was sucked into a fiery tunnel. I thought I'd blown it, the constant clanging was the sound of mistaken hits, until I suddenly emerged from the tunnel to find myself dumped before a scoreboard. It said: Falconetti 30,000, Visitor 31,000. I'd beaten him by a whisker.

And then he was there. Or rather, I wasn't—I was back at the circus, and he was playing midair mumblety-peg and looking at me admiringly. "*Wooo-eee!*" he bellowed. "Nice shooting, cowboy!" He really did seem impressed, but the last time I'd seen him smiling like that was just before he'd chucked a knife that had parted my hair. I waited to see how he really felt, to see if he was going to help me in the real world.

He seemed to read my mind, and he nodded his head—as if to say, "A deal's a deal."

"I think you're ready to fly with the Falcon," he said. "Meet me back at the hacienda. We'll talk. Tell Twig I said it's all right."

"You mean you were there at Twig's all the time?"

"Don't beat yourself up about it, cowboy. If you'd tried to look around for me, Twig would have kicked you into tomorrow. See you there."

I came to back at my desk. Falconetti had booted me out without me even knowing it.

I yanked off my visor and gasped for air, as if I'd been underwater. Everything happened so fast. It took a minute before I realized I was grinning. Falconetti was clearly a lunatic. Just as clearly, his love of knives—and the amazing dexterity he showed with them—made me begin to think that perhaps he was a likely Ripper suspect. Maybe this was why Clare Burton was afraid to call him in, or why Magnotta had reacted so vociferously to the mere mention of him. I had no other evidence of this, but still, there was no keeping the thought at bay—was he the one who'd killed all those people, and nearly killed Catherine? Was it, then, an act of insanity to ask him to help Catherine? And why *was* I grinning?

Because I'd enjoyed myself. It was the simple, fundamental intoxicant of cyberspace, the height of unreality itself—to be something you're not. The belief that you've exceeded the capabilities of your own body, of your own mind, was the greatest drug mankind had so far developed, and its indulgence had taken down far more talented souls than mine. Falconetti, clearly, was a junkie, and it was as if he'd given me a little taste of his pleasure. I had to slow down, but it was difficult. The ride had been absolutely scintillating.

It was the return ride to Hoboken that brought me back to the real world. In the silent cab, in the country, racing along an unspooling ribbon of midnight blue highway, I came back to reality. I looked out at the distant Manhattan skyline, receding like a bauble beyond the horizon, and realized that the greatest reality was that I was way beyond my element. I was dealing with something that was incomprehensible in its horror. And I was on my way to meet with a suspect in the perpetration of that horror. At his lonely hideaway. In the dark. And I wasn't smiling anymore.

Chapter 13

MENAGE A TROIS

I was still a little nervous as Twig let me into his humble abode. I was also exhausted, and half-tempted to ask him for a hit of whatever it was he was "cooking" for Falconetti. But then, recalling the maniacal, crackling energy that seemed to surround Falconetti even in cyberspace, I decided against it.

"He wired me you were coming," Twig told me. "He's in there." He indicated the door to a side room.

I looked at the door, just across the room. "He 'wired you' from the ten feet away?" I asked.

Twig just shrugged and went back to sparring with his shadow. "Once you open that door, you're on your own, man," he called after me.

"So what else is new?" I mumbled, opening the door and stepping into the room.

I wasn't prepared for what awaited me.

Falconetti was suspended in the strangest decking unit I'd ever seen. Apparently, spending the vast amounts of time in cyberspace that he did, he required something more than other state-of-the-art systems I'd seen, which usually resembled a high-tech leather Barca-lounger. Falconetti's

setup involved no furniture. He appeared to be hanging from the ceiling by a web of intravenous feeds, and he was tangling with them, thrashing and cursing as I stepped into the room.

"Twig, you brain-dead moron, what kind of nootropic crap were you feeding me!" he hollered. He pulled his decking visor—again, customized, it looked more like a gladiator's helmet—and hurled it across the room. He slapped at the wires and tubes until he was able to sit up.

That was when I noticed that the walls of the room were covered with knives. Knives of every size, shape, and variety. I revised my opinion of his connection to the Ripper case. I put him back at the top of the suspect list.

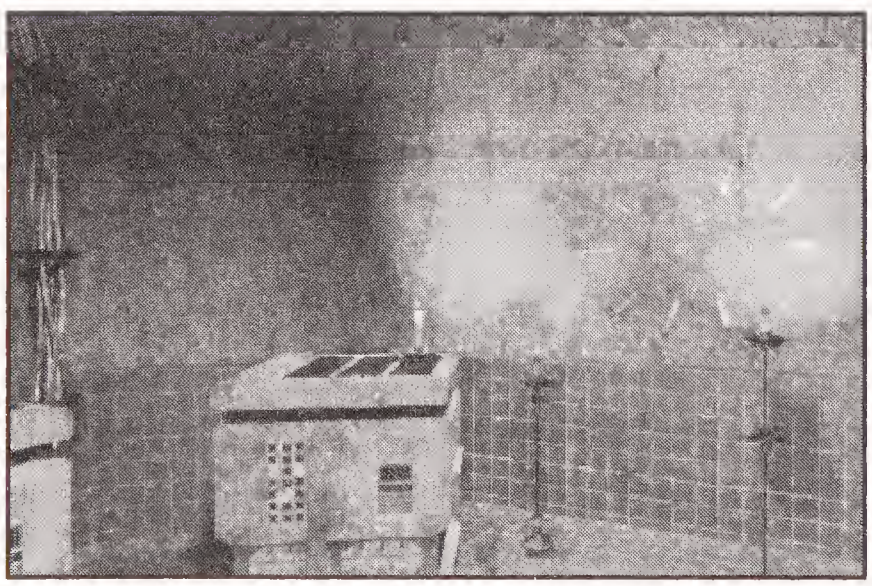
Meanwhile, Falconetti had twisted around to examine one of his feed bags angrily. "Cripes, no wonder I lost that contest to you," he muttered. "Twig!" he suddenly screamed.

Something about Falconetti's manner told me he was easily distracted. That, plus the knives, led me to believe that it would be best if I got to the questions fast.

"What's with all the knives?" I asked. I hadn't meant to say a word about them, but I guess they'd made an even greater impression on me than I'd realized.

He turned and galvanized me with a vicious stare.

"Oh, I see," he said. His voice was so cold it seemed to reduce the temperature of the room. "I collect knives and there's a serial killer on the loose. I must be him, huh? Man, I heard reporters were smart, but, like, I had no idea!"



"So why don't you tell me your take on the Ripper?" I asked.

Then Falconetti's face did a one-eighty; he looked first surprised, then thrilled.

"Hey, I just got it—you're the guy he writes to!" he exclaimed. "Whoa, man, he's incredible! I mean, he gets in there and does it, man, and it's the worst ever, and nobody's got a clue! I mean, that's a man knows how to handle a blade!"

His enthusiasm wasn't exactly contagious.

"You sound like a fan," I observed carefully.

"I can't get it out of my head, man. I mean, I been collecting knives for thirty years and I don't have the slightest idea what kind of blade he's using."

Just the thought of it seemed to send him off on a happy train of thought; his eyes glazed over as he stared vacantly at the wall of knives.

I tried to pull him back by asking how he hooked up with Burton.

He snorted. "Babe's got the hots for me," he said. "Has for years."

There was no follow-up for such a statement. Either he was delusional, or Clare Burton was a woman of unsuspected shallowness.

"What about Magnotta?" I asked.

Falconetti's response to Magnotta's name was surprisingly similar to Magnotta's response to Falconetti's name: immediate and profuse cursing.

"He's worse than the criminals he beats the crap out of! I'd like to take Magnotta and —"

I told him I got the picture. This was getting me nowhere, except to confirm that Magnotta and Burton and Falconetti were all acquainted, and apparently had been for a long time. As to how, though, it was clear I was going to have to look elsewhere.

It was time to get to my primary reason for being there: I told him about Catherine, and I asked him for help.

Unfortunately, my mention of Magnotta had put him in a rancorous mood.

"Why should I risk my ass for you?" he spit out.

A fair question, but one I had a lot of answers for. I told him if he saved Catherine, it would restore the monitor image and we could catch the Ripper. He'd be famous.

Falconetti, though, had a somewhat obvious answer to this one.

"I'm an outlaw, you numskull! What do I want with publicity?"

I hadn't thought of that.

I told him it was a chance to show up Burton.

He said there was no need. He'd already done that, many times.

I was nearly ready to give up when I thought of one more. I told him it would piss off Magnotta.

He said he'd meet me at the ICU just after midnight.

It was what I'd come to hear. I should have been happy, but I wasn't. In fact, now I was more uncertain of things than ever. Now, in addition to the fact that the lead police investigator was acting suspiciously, and the city's most prominent cyber-surgeon was, too, I'd discovered they were all apparently in cahoots on something, even if it was only mutual hatred. But why were they acquainted in the first place, and what were they hiding? And what did it have to do with the Ripper?

I headed back out into the night. The plot, as they say, had thickened.

END OF ACT I

Act Two

Chapter 14

ULTERIOR MOTIVE GRIDLOCK

WHAT I wanted was a giant pill, something about the size of a child's head, some horse tablet that would cure me of the feeling I had, which was that I was in a perverted Agatha Christie novel—you know, the one where everyone did it, including the woman you'd gotten naked and biblical with just the night before?

Things had been confusing enough before I'd found the laser cane in Catherine's apartment. Magnotta, Burton, Falconetti—I'd found nothing but weird and implicating stuff on all of them, as if they had some kind of complicated tag-team murder match worked out between them. I didn't want to have to consider whether Catherine should now be considered part of that team—although her secretiveness in general, and her laser cane in particular, resonated, somehow, along with the Victorian bloodbath that gripped the city. But hell, the woman was in a coma, which was a damned good alibi if you asked me.

But by the time I got back in town, it had become clear to me that the best leads I had all revolved around Catherine—if Falconetti really could help to rebuild her memory, she could tell us who had attacked her, and the case would be solved. Of course, to get that far, I had to deal with not only the maniacal Falconetti, but another suspect, Clare Burton.

But where better to go than the horse's mouth, so to speak? With any luck at all, I'd soon be talking to Catherine herself. Or at least to her brain. That would constitute what we call in my business a direct source.

And the more I thought about it, the more I rationalized that there was some reason to trust Falconetti, at least, despite the evidence so far mounted against him. After all, if he were the Ripper, he wouldn't be willing to help me reconstruct the image, would he? It was Burton who was acting suspicious on that account. Her resistance to sending data angels into Catherine's mind was as bad as Magnotta hiding evidence. It was those two who seemed to be opposed to identifying the Ripper; it was Falconetti who seemed eager to find out who he was. True, his reason for this appeared rather perverted—as though he wanted to chat about knives with the guy—but the point was he wasn't throwing up obstructions to the investigation the way Magnotta and Burton were.

So, as I crossed the lobby of the Meta-Cog, I tried to focus on that one, simple bit of reasoning—that Falconetti wouldn't be going in there in order to retrieve an image that would turn out to be his own maniacally smirking mug. It was the only thing that made any sense in an investigation that was confusing as hell, and this logical thought revived my spirits somewhat. Until it occurred to me that Falconetti might be going in there to mess with Catherine's ability to retrieve anything at all.

Which is when my spirits flagged again. Falconetti, the underground criminal with a wall of knives, was as likely a suspect as any of them, I reminded myself. And with that, I came back to where I'd started from: They'd all done it.

So by the time I was standing in front of Vivien Santiago at the reception desk I was back in full-fledged wary-reporter mode. This translates, roughly, to three little words: Trust no one.

Chapter 14

"Hiya Quinlan," Vivien chirped, rousing me from my depression with a salacious wink. "No word on your squeeze. Burton's keeping all the paperwork to herself for some reason."

So what else was new? "Did Falconetti show up?" I asked, trying not to notice the way the comely Nurse Santiago pushed back in her chair and crossed her nylon-covered legs provocatively.

"Yup," she replied. "As a matter of fact, he's up there fighting with the Ice Queen right this very minute. I wish those two would just hop in the sack and get it over with. Hey, speakin' of which, how come you didn't come back and see me on my break last time?"

"I'm here to see my girlfriend," I said, trying not to smile in spite of myself. "She's in a coma, remember?"

Viv donned a fake—albeit fetching—pout. "Well, whaddya know, a guy who's faithful," she muttered out of the side of her mouth. "All right, all right, run along and visit her then, see if I care."

I bit my lip, nodded, and started off. The elevator door was closing in my face when I heard her call after me, "But call me if she croaks."

I was still trying not to smile when I got to the door of the ICU lab.

So I must have looked pretty stupid for a minute, standing there with a half-formed grin on my face as I was arrested in mid-motion of throwing open the door to the ICU—the raised voices emanating from behind it had jerked me back from la-la land.

"I said *no*, Joey," Burton's firm and commanding tones echoed from within the ICU.

"That's all you've ever said to me—'No, Joey, no, Joey, no!'" came Falconetti's tantrum-like reply. "I'm telling you, Clare, I can find out what happened to this babe. Besides, you always call me in on these. If you don't this time, it's gonna look bad."

"No kidding," Burton snapped back at him. "Why do you think Magnotta brought her here in the first place?"

Falconetti must have had a fit. I could almost picture him stamping his feet like an elf from hell as he exploded, "God damn that guy! He's gonna try and pin this whole thing on me!"

"Or me," Burton told him, the icy control returning to her voice. "Which is why we do it my way. And I say *no*."

My emotions got the better of me. I should have stayed out of it, waited to hear if they revealed anything more. But Burton's continuing resistance, flying in the face of reason, pissed me off. I practically kicked the door open.

"No *what*, doctor?" I said.

Startled, Falconetti turned and saw me standing in the doorway, and a huge smile broke out on his face, as if Santa Claus had just walked in.

"Yo, Quinlan!" he said. "Tell this whacked-out witch to let me save your girlfriend."

I was just about to do that very thing—about to demand it, in fact—but one look at Burton put me on guard. As much as I wanted Falconetti to go ahead with the procedure, it was a plain fact that Burton ran the show at that hospital. Some diplomacy was in order.

Chapter 14

"Look," I began, trying to sound somewhat deferential. "I couldn't help overhearing your argument, and—"

She cut me off. Cut me off at the knees, as a matter of fact. "You newspaper scum," she said, with more heat than I was usually able to arouse in most women, let alone ice queens. "Are you worried about your girlfriend, or your story?"

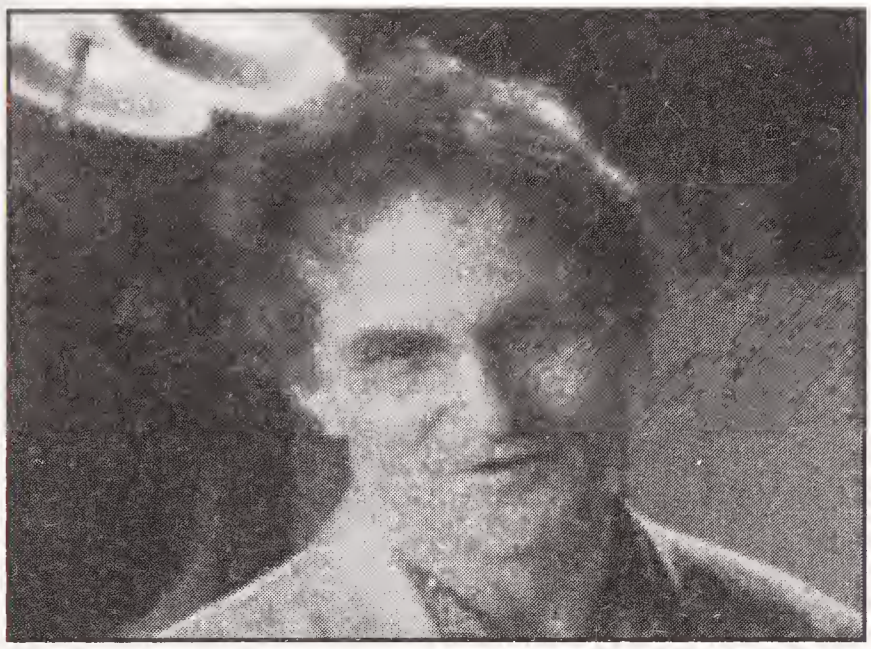
All right, so the gloves were off.

I pulled out my note pad and started flipping pages, like I was reading Burton the riot act. I pointed out that she was the one who appeared to have an ulterior motive, as both she and Falconetti quite clearly had something going on with Magnotta that had nothing to do with me. She denied it, of course, said the ornery detective was just after his bounty any way he could get it. But I told her to can it; I told her I knew that she went way back with Magnotta. It was only half a bluff—I was guessing, based on the confidential way she'd been talking about him with Falconetti before I'd come into the room.

It turned out to be a good guess, though, like the time I'd taken Lou Brannon's gun and instinctively put a bullet in the head of a target dummy: Burton blanched, putting a hand to her throat. I had her now.

Except then Falconetti threw a spanner into the works. In a surprising turn of events, he stepped up between me and Burton and took the heat.

"You don't understand, Jakie-boy, Magnotta used to be a different guy," he said. "See, he used to be a scumbag. Now he's a scumbag with a badge."



I looked past Falconetti directly at Burton. "And how long *have* you two known each other?" I pressed, and I thought I still had her—she was hugging herself delicately.

But Clare Burton was not a woman unacquainted with self-control.

"Look, Quinlan, it's personal," she said, recovering her professional bearing somewhat. "It has nothing to do with your girlfriend, believe me."

I wasn't sure whether to believe her or not. Something about her change in demeanor was convincing, I had to admit. She'd deflected my line of inquiry, at any rate; I relented somewhat, and turned to Falconetti. I asked him to explain the procedure to me again.

"Her essence, her personality, whatever, it's still in there. I can access her brain like I could a computer," he said, getting excited at the very prospect. "It'll be like opening a can of tuna fish."

"It's not that simple," Burton interrupted, returning to her old clipped tones. "For one thing, there's some serious psychological ICE to deal with. You'll be fighting with her mind! The strain of it could kill her."

I took this in. Finally, Burton was explaining herself a little bit. "How about it, Falconetti?" I said. "This dangerous?"

He slapped a hand to his forehead like I was an idiot. "*Is this dangerous?* Of course it's

dangerous!" he exclaimed. "All the emotions and memories and stuff you're digging up are dangerous, man! And what if all that digging accidentally erases something? You ever think of that? But, goddamn it, it's worth the risk. I'm telling you, Quinlan, I can rebuild that chick's memory, make that image on the monitor so real it'll be like you're staring the Ripper right in the eye! You don't think that's worth it? I mean, come on!"

He was right, of course. We were talking about saving not only Catherine, but all the potential Ripper victims of the future. I tossed the ball back to Burton.

"What's your real reason for preventing this?" I asked her. She was in a position. I thought she might come clean.

Guess again, Mighty Quin.

"You're worse than Magnotta," she said disgustedly. "You two do anything you want. I'm going to the gym."

And with that, she stalked out, Falconetti calling after her, "Good idea! Tighten up those buns, baby! They're sagging! They're sagging!"

He rubbed his hands together excitedly and turned to me. "I thought she'd never leave. You ready?"

It caught me off guard. "What, *now*?" I stammered. I guess I wasn't as prepared to dig into Catherine's brain as I'd thought I was; I'd been thinking there'd be some kind of prep work, that we wouldn't be just jumping in there. "You mean, right away?" I queried stupidly.

"Damn right," he said, whacking me on the back so hard I nearly spit up a lung. I gagged while he got serious. "Here's the deal. It's gonna take everything I got for me to maintain a link between us and to isolate a pathway to whatever's left of this broad's consciousness. That leaves you to fight the ICE. You up to it?"

Clearly, I hadn't really thought this out. I had no experience in biological decking, I was used to decking into computers. And I

didn't have a whole lot of experience fighting ICE of any kind, let alone this dreaded psychological stuff Burton had described. But I was the one who'd been pressing for this.

Falconetti repeated his question.

I gulped and said, "Yes."

Falconetti slapped me on the back again. "Atta boy, Jake my man," he said.

"Boy, you're really gonna get to know your girlfriend now," he added. "Talk about getting naked—it's like, whoa, let's see what's under this brain cell here! Why look—it's a memory of your girlfriend humping another guy! And whaddya know, she's got a million of 'em!"

He went on like this, cackling and talking to himself while he prepped his decking unit and settled in with it at one of the computer stations. I was too busy watching my hands shake to comment as I hooked my decking unit up to the console, and donned the second set of decking visors.

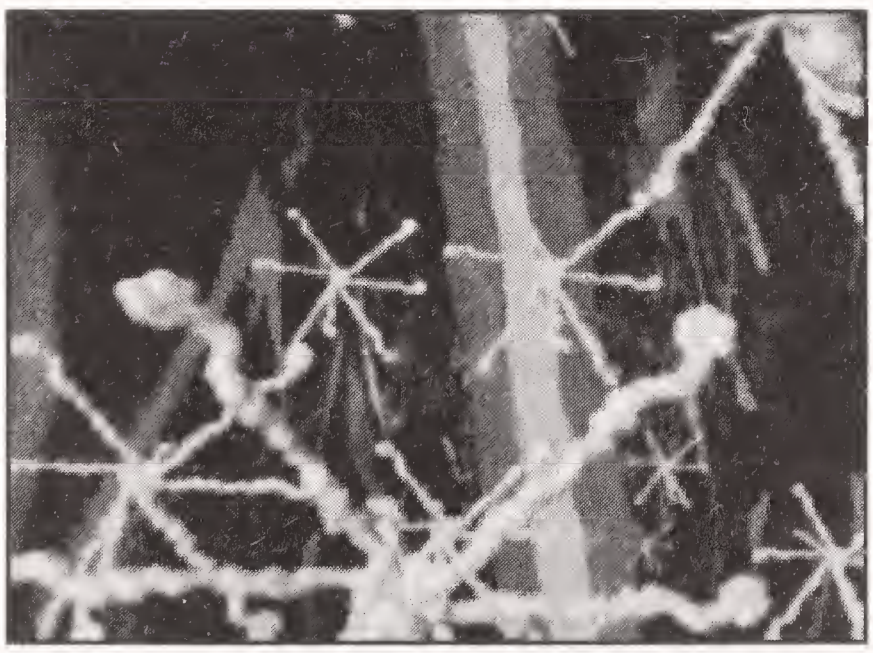
"Houston, we have liftoff!" was the last thing I heard him shout before I was zooming into darkest cyberspace, and then into the even darker depths of the human brain.

Chapter 15

FINALLY: I CAN READ A WOMAN'S MIND

THERE is no good way to describe what decking into another human consciousness is like. It was scarier than falling off a skyscraper, more thrilling than whitewater rafting, more exhilarating than a religious experience. To be frank, put it all together and it was more intense than sex.

It wasn't anything at all like decking into another computer. It was more like—becoming part of someone's body, becoming part of what they *know*.

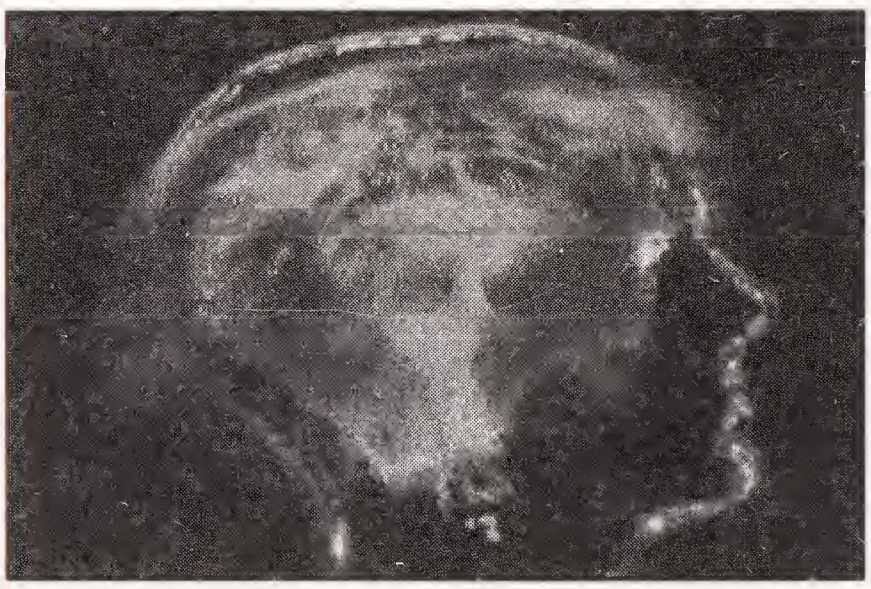


Falconetti pointed this all out in his own inimitable fashion the moment we got there—after rushing me through cyberspace in the quickest yet most dexterously controlled free fall I'd ever experienced—by throwing his head back and launching into a blood-curdling war whoop and shouting, "Toto, we for damn sure ain't in Kansas no more!"

I'd figured that out already. We were in a strange, pink

landscape, that looked both dead and throbbingly organic at the same time. Surfaces were wet and smooth and bulging, a virtual mountain range that seemed to stretch off to infinity. The first step I'd taken had made a profoundly disturbing squishing sound, which seemed to make the very air around me quiver as if it were alive. Which, I suppose, it was. My own body seemed to quiver in biological resonance, as if my knees had turned to jelly, along with the rest of me. It was kind of nice. Sensual, even.

"Hey! You having a good time over there?" Falconetti bellowed. "Maybe you'd like to be left alone with your girlfriend's lymph nodes or something?"



I looked over his way and tried to focus on him, but was still distracted by the way the place seemed to be pulsing, with a sound like the ocean in the distance.

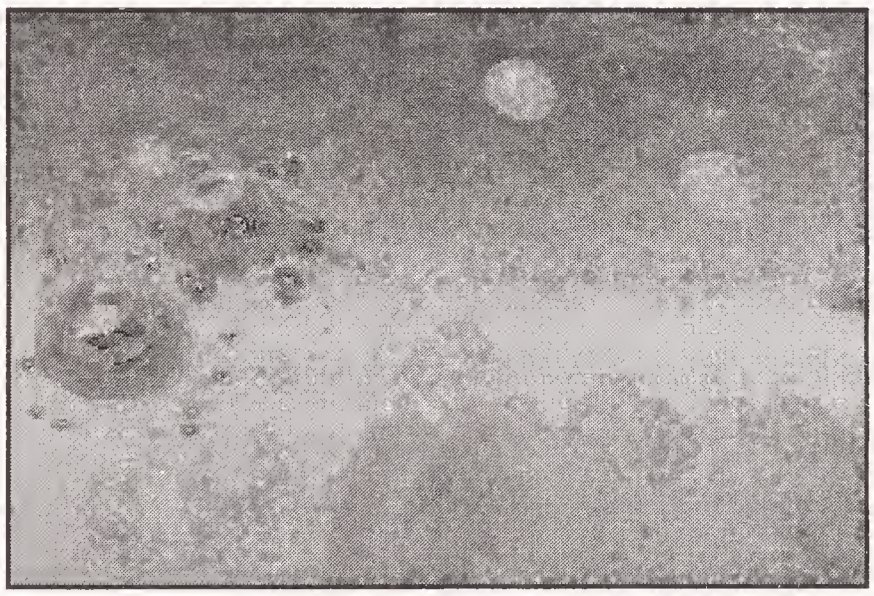
Then I finally realized Falconetti was glowering at me.

"You having some kind of back-to-the-womb experience?" he asked me, his voice dripping with sarcasm. "Because if you don't get it together pronto, you're gonna be headed in the opposite direction from birth, you moron. You're gonna be headed to the great beyond. The big nothing. The final pit stop. And you're gonna be taking me with you!" he screamed. "Get a move on!"

It was true. I had kind of drifted off. But it seemed kind of nice in there. "What are you talking about?" I asked him, annoyed with my irritable traveling companion already.

"The ICE, you cretin!" he screeched. "While you're getting yourself off over there, those vibrations you're enjoying so much are sending out the signal—we're here, baby! And they will be, too, any second now."

He knew what he was talking about. The ICE loomed up moments later, wicked-looking metallic-glinting organic blobs racing toward us like lumpen mercury gone evil. Out of the corner of my eye I saw Falconetti duck while I took aim at them just over his head. I could see him working some kind of hand device he'd brought along while I took aim and fired, spinning and shooting like a dervish from one direction to another as if I were General Custer on that last hilltop.



This was no last stand, however. I was having some success holding them off while Falconetti inched forward, and I did my best to follow and keep a path clear ahead of him.

It became, in short order, an adrenaline-driven dance macabre, as I swung my arm back and forth over Falconetti's head, then spun around to protect our rear, then pirouetted back to the fore, while those corpuscles from hell exploded and rained silver pustules all around us. They kept coming at us, relentlessly moving as if on tracers of sonar, turning and banking and swooping and strafing in a relentless cyber-kinetic blitzkrieg. With each one I shot, two more seemed to charge toward us, although a quick glance over my shoulder told me we were making some actual progress—I could no longer see the spot we'd started from. And not one of them had touched us—yet.

Meanwhile, Falconetti worked on, undaunted, hunched over and scooting forward steadily, his fingers flying over his device and his lips mumbling soundlessly in feverish calculation.

The blobs kept coming faster and faster, lower now, and in greater numbers, sometimes singly, and sometimes in clumps

that split formation like fighter planes peeling off to soar down in a relentless dive bomb.

I was in trouble.

And then Falconetti was shoving me out of the way. "Let me get a piece of this," he hollered, joyously ripping into them like a man possessed. It was all over before I knew it.

I felt a rush like I'd never felt before. I didn't even mind when the sweaty Falconetti slapped me on the butt as if we were Super Bowl champs in the locker room afterwards.

"Way to go, man!" he exclaimed. "To tell you the truth, I didn't think you had it in you!"

"That was the dreaded psychological ICE Burton was talking about?" I asked, trying to catch my breath. I guess I might have sounded just a bit cocky. I readjusted. "Thanks for your help."

"Yeah, nothing to it, huh, you knucklehead?" Falconetti gibed. "Well, this part should be a piece of cake for you. Check it out."

He was jabbing his thumb toward whatever was in front of us; I was still looking back the way we'd come, impressed that the skies were empty, admiring my own work … and maybe feeling just the tiniest bit nervous I might have missed one of the flying quicksilver jellyfish. When I looked the way Falconetti was indicating, I saw we were standing before what looked like a long, shimmering tunnel, at the end of which appeared to be a warm, glowing light.

"After you, killer," Falconetti said.

To me, it looked like the scene people describe when they've been brought back from death. I hesitated. Falconetti shoved me forward.

"This is it, you moron. This is what we came here for," he said. "Good luck."

He stayed behind. I was on my own.

Chapter 15

After fighting the ICE, I was ready for anything. I moved forward crouching, the way I'd seen soldiers in movies "walk point." If an angel popped out and told me welcome to heaven, I'd shoot him dead.

I hadn't gone more than a few steps, however, when there was a great flash, and suddenly I wasn't in the tunnel anymore. I was in another strange, infinite landscape that seemed to have no boundaries yet I felt confined—as if I were surrounded by an invisible force field.

The sounds, though, were the first thing that caught my attention. There was a myriad of voices at shifting volumes, as if the wind were blowing them away. Some of them were hard to make out, others clearer; some were men's voices, many women's, and lots sounded as though they belonged to children. Some were speaking conversationally, some were pleading plaintively; some were giggling and some were shouting. There were faint snatches of what sounded like nursery rhymes, the droning voices of teachers or politicians, and the occasional stern bark that was unmistakably parental.

Then I stopped dead in my tracks. Catherine's body was floating before me, levitating with a flowing sheet draped over her just as it was back in the ICU lab. Only there was no gurney beneath her—she didn't *look* like she was floating in midair, she *was* floating in midair.

There seemed to be a slight breeze, gently and occasionally mussing her hair, shifting the sheet. It imparted some sense of animation to her, of life, although her features were perfectly still.

Falconetti had told me she'd look real, like her corporeal self, but I hadn't been prepared.

I staggered up to her slowly, like I was seeing a vision I didn't want to disturb—as if I'd seen a deer in the yard; I

wanted to get a closer look, but was afraid that the slightest movement would cause it to vaporize.

I didn't know what to say at first, and when I spoke to her all I could elicit was a tortured moan, as if I were causing her pain. Cable had told me he'd take care of her childhood memories with his research, but that I should bring her up to date on her more recent activities. When I did that, she might actually be able to respond. The problem was, I didn't know about those activities myself. I'd have to come back, but at least I knew how to do it now.

I stood at her side and stared at her for a long moment. Then I reached out and stroked her hair. Her eyes seemed to move in their sockets, as if she were responding somehow, but they stayed closed. Maybe I was no more than a dream to her just then.

I went back out and told Falconetti we should go. He was very understanding about it all, showing a gentleness that might have been only momentary, but seemed genuine nonetheless. It almost made me forget he was still someone to watch out for.

By the time we got back to the ICU lab, Bud Cable had come in. He was helping me

disengage from my deck as I returned to the real world like a man returning to sobriety. He assisted me to my feet as I tried to shake off the feeling of viscous air on my skin.

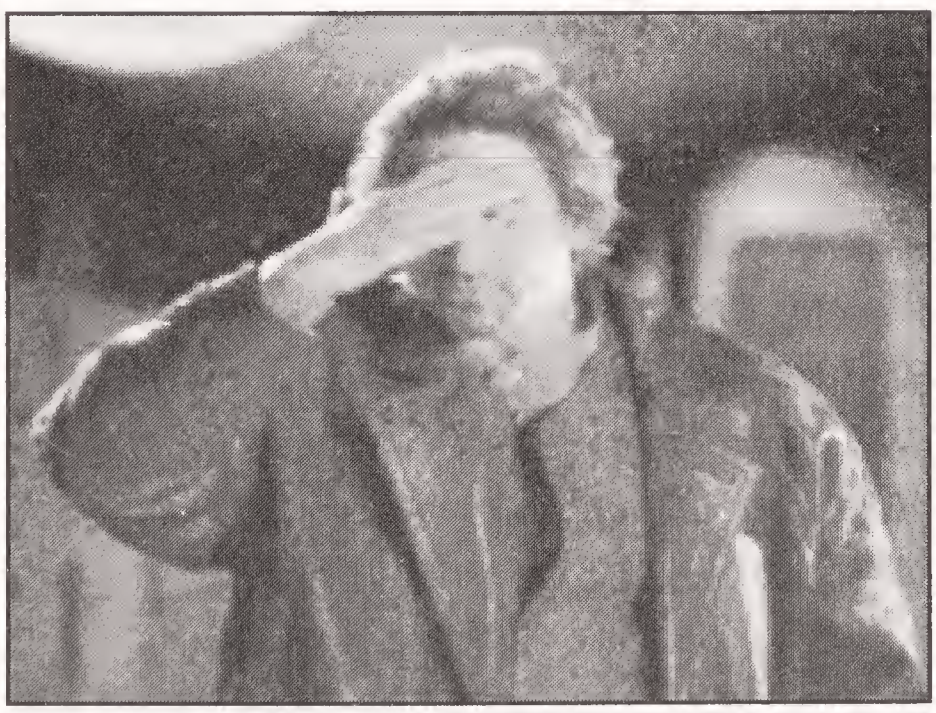
I nearly fell down when Falconetti came up behind me and slapped me on the back.

"Hey, was it good for you, too, Quinlan?" he asked. "You shoulda seen this guy, Cable. Fights ICE like a friggin' veteran. We got us a link established now." He hitched up his pants like a sailor. "Now, if you'll excuse me, my work here is done, and I got about a million girlie magazines to catch up on back at my funky bohemian love pad. Something about fighting with Clare, I don't know what it is, it gets me fired up."

And with that he was gone, leaving Bud Cable chuckling and me considering the option of going in by myself next time.

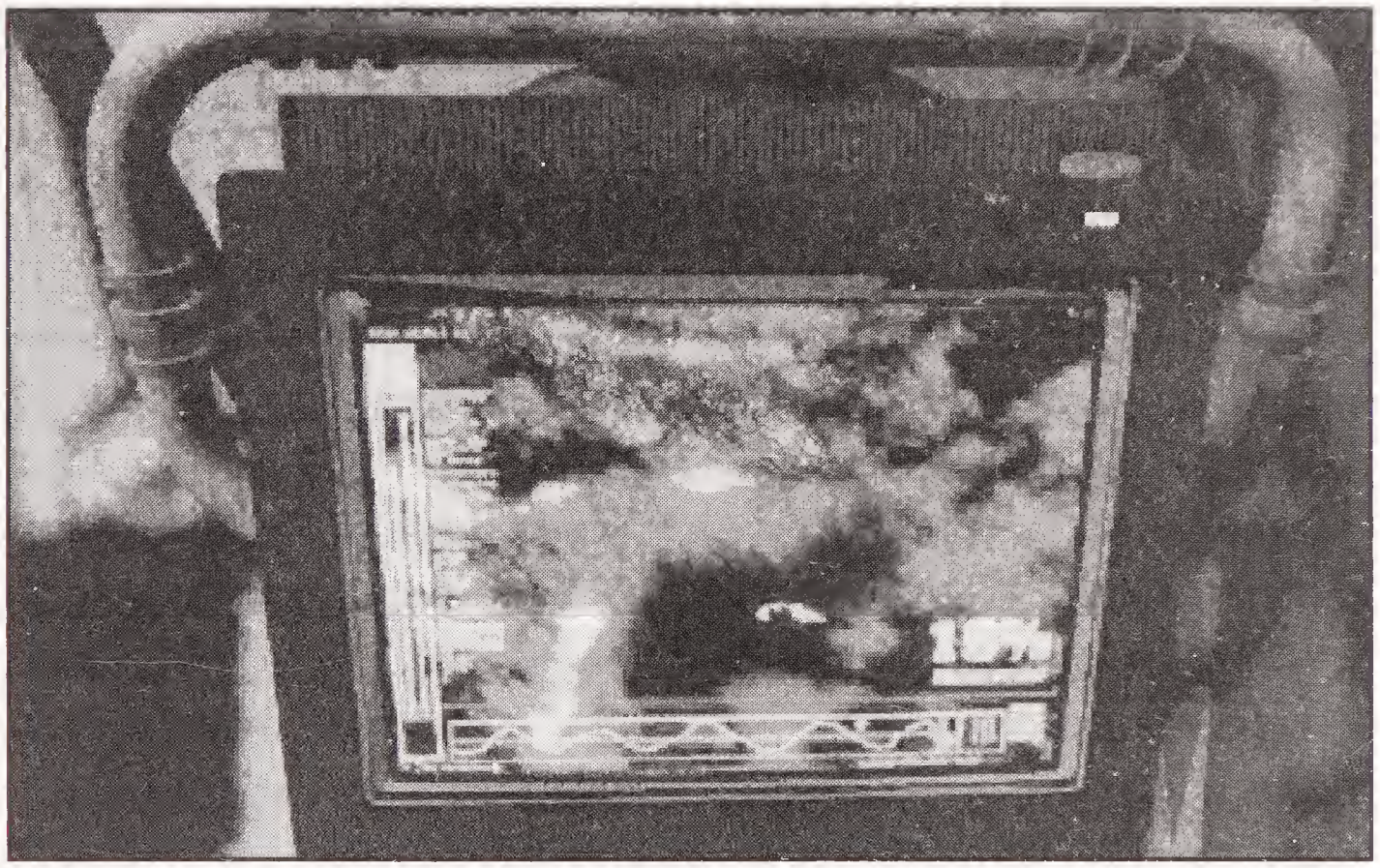
Cable confirmed not only that I could come back to try again, but that he expected me to. "You'll have to make regular decks if this is going to work," he said. "Every time you get some new piece of information that you think she would have known, you'll need to go in there and give it to her. That's the only way we'll rebuild her image of the Ripper."

I sighed, remembering her missing WAC, her encoded notes—things I should have been able to refer to, but couldn't yet. Cable, seeing how jangly I was, slapped a hand to my shoulder. "Look, it was a good start," he said. "Now you know how it's done. Why don't you go home and get some sleep?"



It sounded good, but I knew it was not to be. I

thanked Cable and left him there, glancing back when I got to the door to see him carefully scanning his bank of monitors. I stepped out into the long hallway. As good as his advice sounded, I knew I had miles to go before I slept.



Chapter 16

THE FAT MAN VANISHES

BEFORE I left the Meta-Cog, I decided to stop off and visit Vic Farley. If there'd been a break on uncovering the murder weapon, it would certainly put my mind at ease … unless, of course, the weapon turned out to be a laser cane. Plus, I needed to spend a moment or two with someone who wasn't juking me, or hiding something. Vic knew all the players—Burton, Magnotta, even Falconetti—and often came up with some great insights. On top of all that, Vic was the only person I'd talked to so far who seemed to want to catch the Ripper as badly as I did.

There was also the possibility that I could bum a sandwich off him.

Except there was no Vic there. Some geek I'd never seen before was there instead, and he was shouting at me.

"Hey!" he chirped. His shout wasn't very commanding. "You're not supposed to be in here!"

I told him I was Jake Quinlan, big shot reporter, and that he should be a little nicer or I'd write a story about how he'd been busted for being ugly. Then I asked him who he was.

"I'm Bob Eppels, the new pathologist," he said hesitantly. "And I'm not supposed to speak to you, Mr. Quinlan."

I felt my nerve endings go on full alert. I'm used to people being told not to speak to me, but Vic's absence struck me as ominous.

"Where's Vic?" I asked slowly.

"He is no longer employed here," Eppels said hesitantly, as if he were afraid I wouldn't like this news.

He was right.

I went immediately into full-bore inquisitor mode, and the guy

caved. I asked him where Vic was, and why he'd been fired.

Eppels was easy to intimidate. He fell into a haughtiness that was mostly a defensive sham. The problem was he didn't seem to know anything. He didn't know where Vic was, and all he could say about why Vic was fired was that he apparently talked too much.

"I don't plan on making the same mistakes, Mr. Quinlan," he said. "So please leave. If anybody sees me talking to you ... ."

I cut him some slack. I could see he was genuinely scared, and I didn't want to alienate him entirely. I might need him again. Finding out the real scientific skinny on the murder victims was going to be hard enough, with Karl Stasiak and now Vic Farley removed from the case.

Plus, I felt bad for Vic, and maybe a little guilty. If he'd been canned for talking, it didn't take much of a leap to figure out who they thought he'd been talking to. I made myself a little promise to do what I could to get him reinstated; I had a feeling that if I got the goods on Burton, the hospital would give Vic a break. The threat of an article on the unfair firing of a city employee might help Vic's superiors to see the light.

I pulled out my WAC, intending to give Vic a call and offer up a little sympathy ... except I realized then that I didn't know where he lived. I'd never seen him anyplace but in the morgue. This struck me as rather pitiful for something I considered a friendship. It was something I'd have to rectify once I got through this case. *If* I got through this case, that is.

Chapter 17

I READ MY GIRLFRIEND'S DIARY, AND CRITICIZE HER WRITING

RETRIEVING the image of the Ripper that was stored in Catherine's mind still seemed the most direct route to end the whole miserable shebang. None of my other leads were anywhere near that simple. In fact, I was getting lost in a sea of leads—and they all seemed to be the kind of clues that led to other clues, that required relentless pursuit over a period of time. I'd track down as many as I could, nonetheless, like the journalistic dog that I was. But if we could just rebuild that image on Bud Cable's ICU monitor into something recognizable, then we could all go home.

At the moment, the best way I could see to accomplish that was to unscramble Catherine's notes. After seeing her, free of IV bags and wires and monitors and sensors, I had become a love-drunk fool smitten all over again; I became certain that her notes not only contained an explanation of everything and proof she was pure as the driven snow, but proved just as conclusively that she was equally love-drunk with yours truly. Not to mention we'd catch a horrific serial killer.

Knowing that it was almost certainly Magnotta who had encrypted the notes made my chore somewhat defineable; it

was a safe bet that the code word to reverse the encryption was a word that had personal significance to him. People always choose things like their baby's middle name or their girlfriend's measurements as encryption codes, so they'll be sure to remember them. Now, the trick was to get some information on Magnotta that might help me figure out what his word was. And, since Magnotta seemed to spend every waking hour at the precinct house, I figured that was the place I'd find what I was looking for. I even knew where to look for it: in his personnel file. The only trick was to find a way to get into the file room where I knew they stored such information.

It would not be an easy room to get into. They kept it under tight security—as you can imagine, there were a lot of guys who would have loved to get ahold of the home address of the cop who busted them. To open the door, it took an official magnetic swipe card, something issued only to higher-ups—lieutenants and above. Even Lou Brannon wouldn't be able to help me with this one, I knew. This would be a tough nut to crack.

Who would've figured it would be Magnotta himself who helped me crack it?

What happened was this: I stopped by Lou Brannon's desk to see if he might know anything about the Wofford case, and I got lucky.

I'd barely had time to walk up to Brannon's desk and nod a greeting when Magnotta appeared, shoving his way in front of me as if I were usurping his reserved parking space in front of the desk sergeant.

"Quinlan, what, you got a cot here someplace?" he snarled.

Chapter 17

Then he emptied his pockets into a tray on the countertop, dumping out his badge and his piece and his cuffs … and also his security swipe card. "Here's my stuff, Brannon. I'm going into interrogation," he barked. He seemed irritated when Lou merely glanced at him and sipped from his paper cup of coffee in acknowledgment.

Magnotta hesitated. "How's your coffee, Lou? Nice and hot?" he asked. Then he reached over and stuck a finger in Lou's coffee. He grinned like an idiot. I'd heard of mafiosos sticking their hands over a burning candle, but this finger-in-the-steaming-coffee trick was new to me. Magnotta yanked his finger out and flicked the liquid off it into Lou's face. "Yup, it's hot all right," he said, making his exit.

Lou was looking at his coffee. "See what I'm up against here?" he asked.

"Lou," I said, as if casually; I wanted to draw an answer out of him while he was still distracted. "How would one go about getting background info on a cop?"

"Depends on the cop," he muttered, still staring off in the direction Magnotta had gone. "For some of them, you just need to turn over the rock they crawled out from under."

Then he got a phone call and I reconsidered; I knew he couldn't get me in the file room, even though Magnotta had practically set him up to help me—Lou gave only the faintest sign of this: When he picked up the phone, he said, "Soho Precinct, what's your goddamn problem?"

I reached over and took Magnotta's card while Lou wasn't looking.

"You heard if he's had any new developments in the case?" I asked when Lou was done with the phone call. I figured while I was there I ought to check on the latest. Brannon seemed in a giving mood.

"Yeah," he groused. "The newest development is that Magnotta pulled two cops who've been on the case since the start off the investigation and replaced 'em with a couple of rookies. That's gonna set things back."

"What?" I asked in dismay. "Why the hell would he do that?"

"Who knows?" Brannon muttered sourly. "The guy's a mystery. He's a mystery, wrapped inside an enigma, wrapped inside a kettle of stinking goddamn fish."

It stupefied me, the kind of autonomy given cops in the modern world. Magnotta was allowed to brazenly impede his own investigation, with no apparent intervention from his supervisors. This, on top of the ever-mounting mystery of his actions; he seemed more deliberately intent than ever on sabotaging the Ripper case.

The interview with Lou, however, was going well. I was actually enjoying parts of it. I decided to keep plumbing him for info on my personal list of suspects while I was at it. I asked him about both Clare Burton and Falconetti, and hit unexpected pay dirt.

Chapter 17

"Burton!" Brannon said, brightening big time. "Va-va-va-voom! I mean, not bad for an old dame. I say old—is the broad even forty? The point is, she drives us all nuts. Especially Magnotta. You should see him every time she's in here. He's like some screwed-up Romeo for hours afterwards."

Even though I'd asked the question, the response surprised me. "She comes in here?"

"Every now and then, drops stuff off for Magnotta. I don't know what it is, but she seems to drive him crazy. After she leaves, he walks around, more pissed off than ever, like she won't go out with him or something. You know, now that I think of it, the scumbag probably fits the profile of a stalker."

"What about Falconetti?" I asked.

"The scuttlebutt is that he's involved with the case somehow. All I know for sure is Magnotta pulled all the hard files we have on the guy, and then he encrypted all his computer records."

"Like he's hiding something?" I speculated.

"Now you're getting the idea, Quinlan," Lou congratulated me with a grim smile. "See, that's what we professionals call Magnotta's 'm.o.' "

I tried to smile back, play the game, while the thought of Magnotta's reaction to Burton and Falconetti churned inside my head. I had the feeling I'd been given some vital clues about where to look. I had to research more closely the relationship between Burton, Falconetti, and Magnotta. Clearly, something old and ongoing was percolating between the three of them, bubbling like something about to explode—or maybe like something that had already exploded, resulting in three deaths.

Or maybe four—I remembered the main thing I'd wanted to ask Lou about. "What do you know about the Hamilton Wofford murder, Lou?" I asked.

"I don't know much about that guy," he said, "except that

Magnotta hired him to do some work for the precinct a few years ago."

I felt my nerves tingling again. Magnotta had hired him? "To do what?" I asked.

"Build a virtual target range for the cadets' cyberspace training," Lou told me.

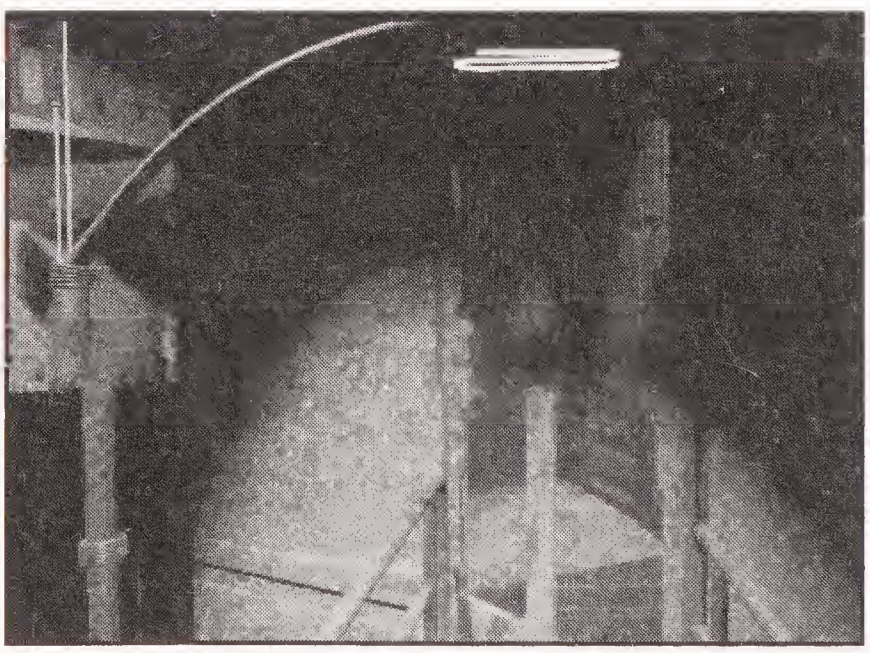
This was getting more and more interesting.

I had other questions for Lou, but they could wait. None of them was as important as what I'd already found out. And you don't want to overstay your welcome with a busy source, especially one working the front desk of a police station. Out in the open like that, people might get suspicious.

Plus, the swipe card was burning a hole in my pocket.

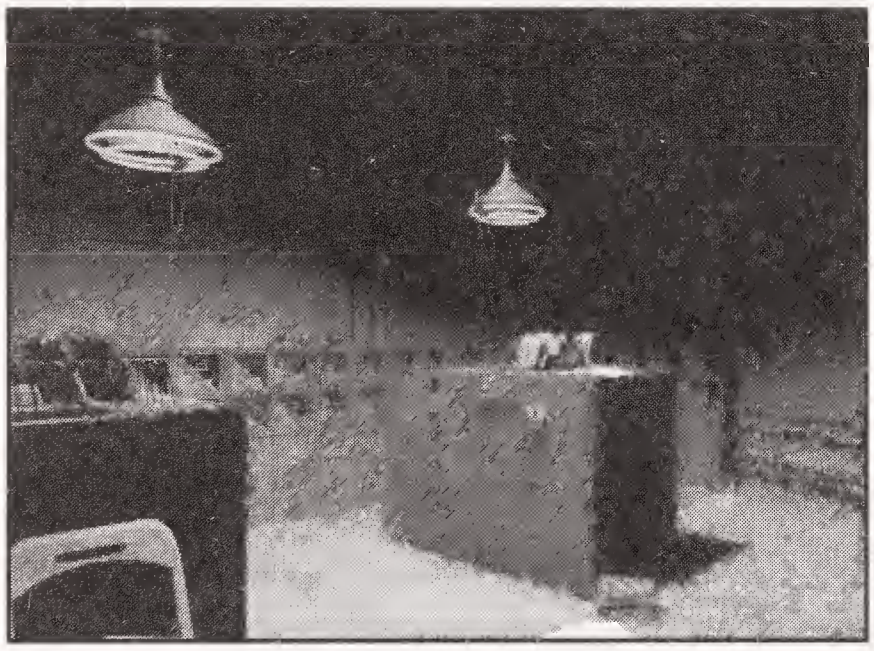
When Lou got another phone call, I edged away from the desk and made my way across the lobby as if I were leaving the building. I waited to make sure he wasn't looking, then slipped down the ramp to the file room. If Lou had seen me, he probably would have figured out what I was up to, and there was no sense in making the man an actual witness to a crime. I might need him again later—like, after I got busted for doing what I was about to do.

By the time I got to the file room door, the concept of B&E in a police station had me just a tad nervous.



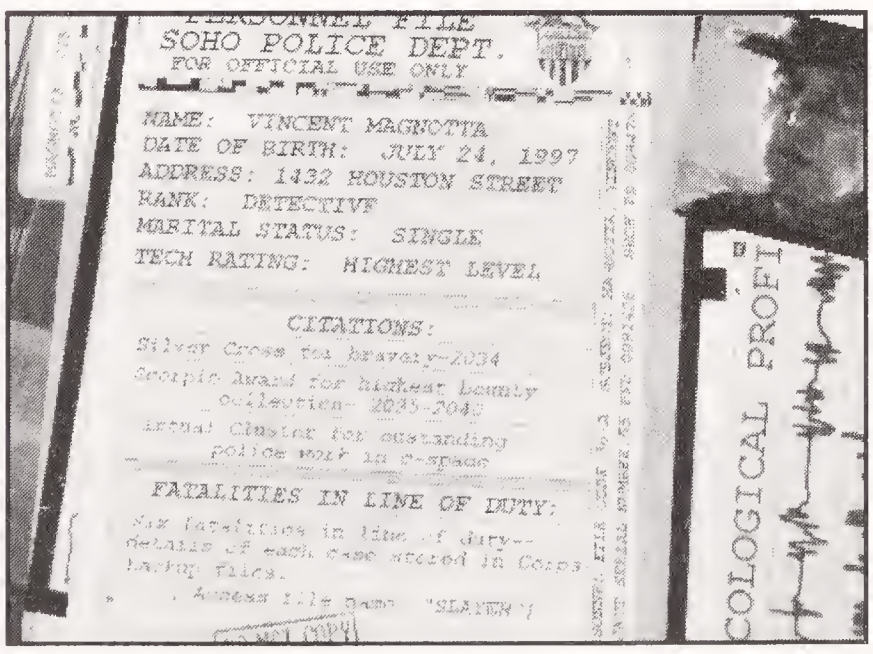
The amazing thing was, however, that everything went smooth as silk. I used Magnotta's swipe card on the door and it opened. When I got inside, I found the file cabinets locked, but it turned out the security card worked

on them, too. I found what I needed in first cabinet I tried. It was like a miracle—all I did was step into the room and use the card on the first file cabinet I saw on my right and voila! The cabinet slid open and I was in the "m's." I nearly stopped to thank Jesus or Allah or somebody, except I was nervous as hell about getting caught and felt the need to rush. With my luck, it would have been Spankowski who caught me, too.



Anyway, it only took a moment of rifling through files before I found Magnotta's. I scanned it quickly.

He had no wife or kids, so that ruled out the most common of all areas for passwords. But I hadn't figured Magnotta would choose anything quite as obvious. My eyes raced ahead to the list of his citations, then to a stark, unexpected category: "Fatalities in Line of Duty." It was the last entry on the file, and it referenced another data source—something called the "Corps backup files." It even listed the backup file's access name, giving it the blunt—and gratuitous—appellation "slayer."



Naturally, I fixated on the word. *Slayer*. It seemed too easy. I decided it was and didn't even try it, although I probably should have. It would have been just like Magnotta to throw in a seemingly devious but actually easy clue. You know, something like hiding a tree in the forest.

But what word would Magnotta choose? The guy was, truly, the most devious bucket of slime I'd ever known; it wasn't going to be easy to assume his point of view. But there was no time to work my way through every word in his file, plugging in one after the other in a tedious process of elimination … and I was convinced the secret word was on the paper I held in my hand.

I tried to calm down enough to study the file more deliberately.

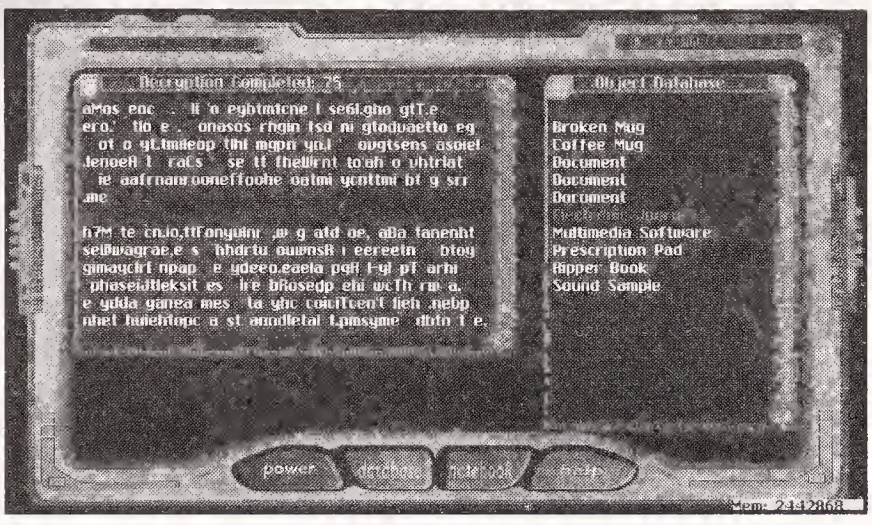
I learned a couple of interesting things. One was that Magnotta had achieved the highest tech rating possible; I had never thought of the greaseball detective as someone who'd be adept at hacking, but there it was.

Then there were the citations, which backed up the hacking credits: His list of awards included one for sleuthing in c-space. The lieutenant was a man of unsuspected cyber-depth. I hadn't even thought the guy capable of connecting to a WELL address.

I started sampling words into my WAC as I continued to scan the document. I kept one eye on my WAC monitor and saw that nothing was working.

Maybe I started to daydream then, in a frustrated kind of way. I typed in the word "ugly," and then "bad suit." I had to force myself to stare at the document, because Magnotta's face was beginning to take shape in my mind, distracting me but giving focus to my anger. I was conscious of staring at the word "scorpion" on the document, not wondering what it meant, but thinking instead that it was a good description of Magnotta's personality. I was just about to type it in when something about the image of Magnotta in my mind took hold; I typed in the word "cigar."

Reporters have to rely on instinct sometimes. You learn, over time, that your hunches are based on more than intuition. Maybe I had actually been able to put myself in Magnotta's frame of mind after all. All I know is that it worked. The password to the encryption was "cigar."



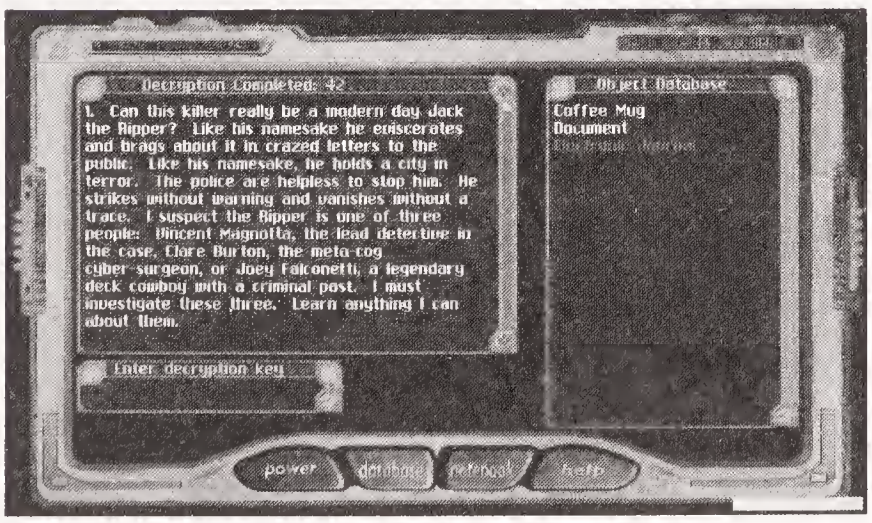
Slowly, the first garbled entry unraveled itself before my eyes and I was able to read it as the letters scrolled through a repositioning that transformed them into English. It wasn't a very fast process, and I read the entry one line at a time, practically snorting—like a racehorse being reined in—at the end of each line while I waited for the next to clarify.

"Can this killer really be a modern-day Jack the Ripper?" it began. I was disappointed for a moment; the entire first graf simply compared the original Ripper to the one who wrote to me. I'd never thought to look up the correspondence of the original Jack the Ripper. But Catherine's comparison showed me that my pen pal had a role model.

Interesting enough. The second entry wasn't quite as interesting. "While in Burton's office," it read, "I noticed an old college text called *Advanced Notional Mapping*. There's an inscription inside. It's a slim chance, but it could be a lead."

Just what I needed—another lead that was a slim chance.

Oblivious now to the threat of discovery, wanting something more substantial, I waited for the rest of the entries to decode. It was slow, but worth it.



I felt like I'd hit the jackpot with the next one.

"Soap delivered as promised," it read. "I can learn even more about Magnotta, Burton and Falconetti … if I dare. I've taken measures to hide what Soap gave me. Using

the book *The Women of Whitechapel and Jack the Ripper* seems appropriate." Then her writing went into a kind of rant that showed me just how important this delivery—of whatever it was—was to her. "If everything works out I'll be rich over this. At first, I didn't have two nickels to rub together. I lived in a ratty triplex for half a dozen years. That will never happen to me a second time."

My first reaction was to go into a writer's copy editing fit. *I'll be rich over this*? How did you get rich "over" something? This wasn't the crisp writing I was used to from Catherine.

But my second reaction was to get excited as hell. Clearly, whatever Soap had "delivered" was something big, and I felt as if I'd just broken the case wide open. If Spankowski had walked in and discovered me I would have kissed him on the lips. Of course, I would have had to kill him immediately afterwards, but still. I was pumped. I couldn't wait for the next entry to unravel itself.

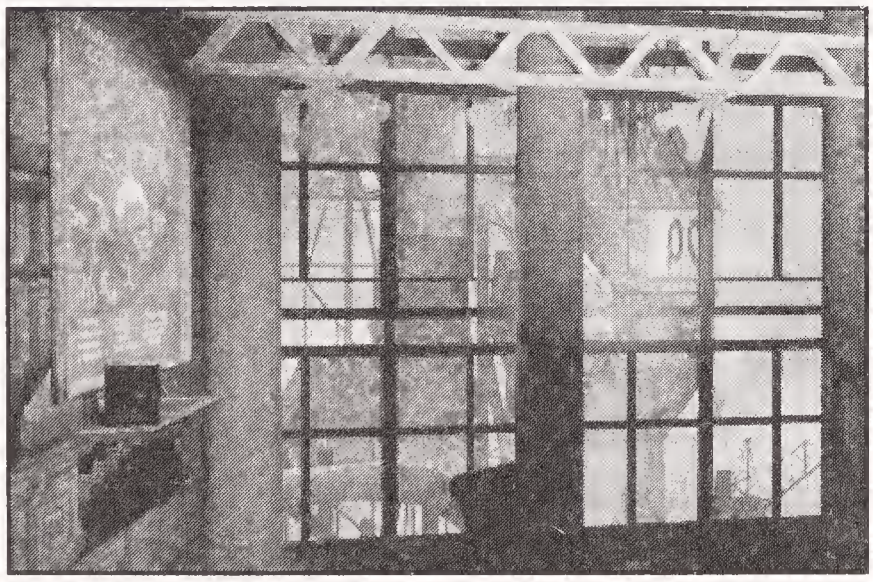
The only problem was, it didn't. The encryption began to slow down, then seemed to grind to a complete stop. I looked at my WAC monitor in disbelief. There were still several entries left. But the letters just kept cycling, then re-cycling, as if the encryption were fighting itself. I looked at my watch, then looked at it again. I was nearly on fire with the urge to see what Catherine had hidden on her bookshelf. I had what seemed like an honest-to-God lead for once. I decided to race to Catherine's apartment once more to see what I could find.

I left the police station feeling that—for the first time since Catherine's attack—I was really getting someplace. I walked with a certain spring in my step, like a man in love. In love with myself and my own cleverness, I suppose, but guys like me, we learn to take what we can get.

Chapter 18

IT PAYS TO CRACK OPEN A BOOK EVERY NOW AND THEN

I'D been in Catherine's apartment more than my own lately, but the place still seemed spooky to me. It was as if I could still hear the echo of my own voice, screaming her name out into the night as I held her sweet, comatose self in my arms. I lowered my head and made a beeline for the bookshelf.

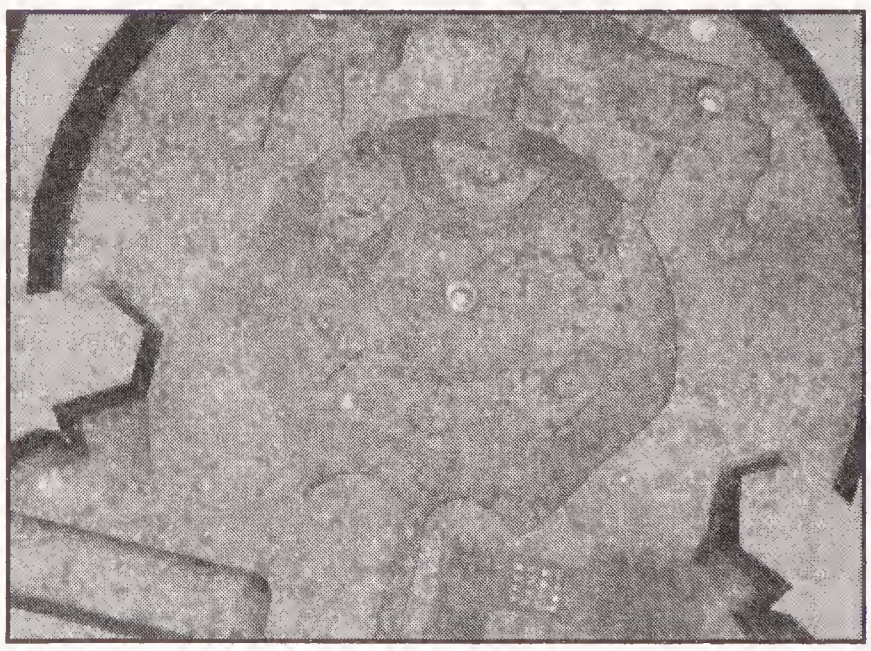


And there it was—*The Women of Whitechapel.* I hefted it for a moment, scanned the cover for clues, then saw some buttons and realized this was no book—it was a mini-safe. My anticipation welled up like a flash flood—this is gonna be good, I thought. Of course, at the same time, I realized I didn't know the combination to work the buttons. Or did I?

I whipped out my WAC and summoned up Catherine's files once again. I remembered the section of her last entry that had struck me as odd. It was more awkward than her writing usually was. Catherine wrote in a clear, succinct prose, with no extraneous thought—like a good journalist, in other words. But, in

addition to her ungrammatical usage of "over," I noticed that the tag end of her third entry seemed more meandering than her usual style. Picky, perhaps, but that's what it means to be a writer for a living, and Catherine had always been a good one. Now, when I read the last few sentences again, I realized she was hiding what she really meant to say, and that only a writer would have picked it up: "At first, I didn't have two nickels to rub together. I lived in a ratty triplex for half a dozen years. That will never happen to me a second time."

The numbers gave it away. Writers learn not to load their language with repetitive imagery, but these three sentences contained five numerical references. I wrote them down and translated them into straight numbers. "At first," I figured, meant one. "Two nickels" was obvious. Then there was "triplex"—three—and "half a dozen years;" six. The last two words—"second time"— gave me the final number of what I was sure was going to be my combination.



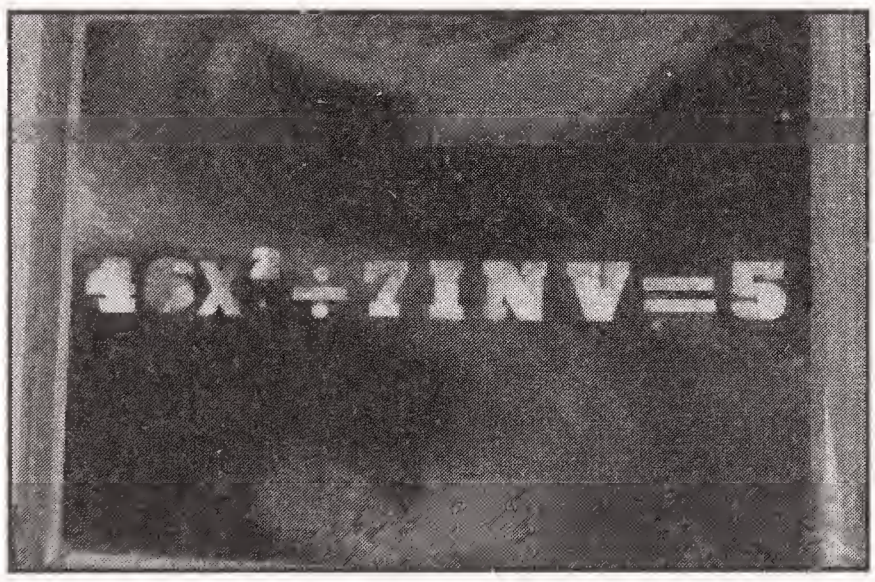
I picked up the book-safe and plugged in "155362," and the safe opened like a charm.

Inside, I found a disk, sitting there like a jewel in a box. I took it to the computer on Catherine's desk and slid it in the disk drive eagerly.

Slowly, a weird image appeared on-screen, first some

numbers and characters, some garbled stuff, and then it settled on the numbers. It was a mathematical equation: 46 X 2^2 ÷ 7inv = 5. It hovered there on the screen, doing nothing but puzzling me. I figured it was a code to unlock something—some device, a secret file, or even a safe combination. But how to find out what?

I tapped out the sequence on her computer's keyboard and nothing happened, but then I realized this made sense—hiding the encryption code to something in the computer would be like writing the combination to a safe on the wall next to the safe. No, Catherine, dear Catherine—light of my life, sunshine of my existence—was far too devilish for that. The computer was a red herring. This was the combination to something else. But what?



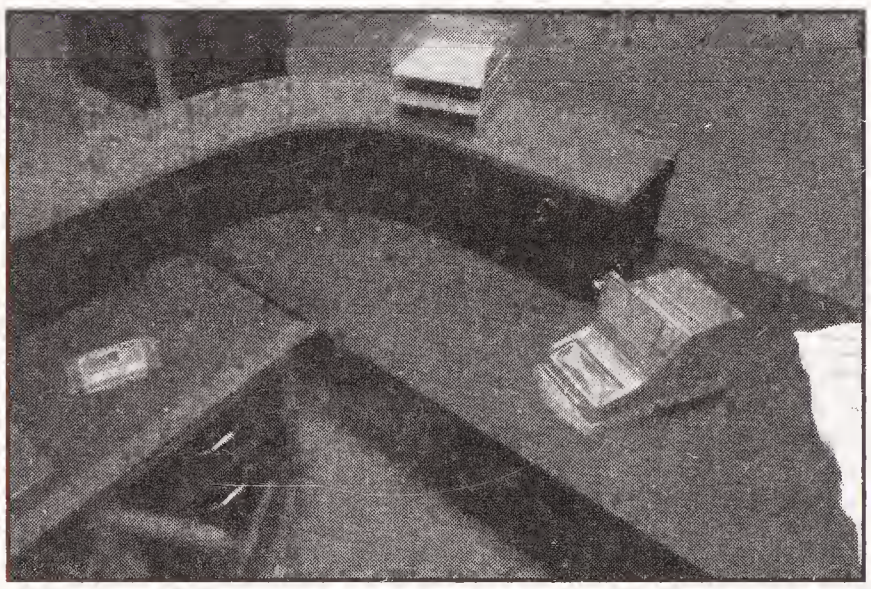
I fell back in the chair in frustration and glanced around the room. I felt the energy surge I'd acquired at the hospital draining out of me. There was nothing in the place that looked like it held any answer. I looked back at the equation floating on the screen, muttered an appropriate oath, then stared blankly at the desktop.

Maybe not so blankly; after a moment, I started thinking about Catherine's desk back at the newsroom, and I remembered that one of the things that had puzzled me about it was the calculator she kept there—how it looked unused, how I wondered what she even needed one for. After all, her computer could have handled any calculation imaginable. I was suddenly sure that that number pad was the one I wanted.

I'd quit looking at my watch at this point. But if I had checked it, I probably would have found that I got to the newsroom in record time.

Checking to make sure Lou wasn't out prowling the newsroom—I was late with my filing once again, but you have to prioritize things in this life—I hurried to Catherine's desk, grabbed the calculator, and punched in the sequence I'd discovered in her apartment. I was promptly rewarded. And they told us in school never to use a calculator …

A small panel slid open and a couple of weird-looking little doodads clattered out into my lap. One looked just like a human eyeball, and the other like a cigar band. But that's not what they really were.



It was at this point that the depth of Catherine's subterfuge became apparent to me, like a flashbulb in the face, for what I'd found concealed in that secret compartment was something I was all too familiar with, although not because I'd ever used them myself. What I'd found were two surveillance devices, also known as bugs. I knew what they were because they were the kind of thing that was always whispered about in a newsroom, the way you can always find steroids in a locker room. But while it was true that some reporters stooped to the use of such devices, I never did, and I'd never encouraged Catherine to, either. The simple fact that she had them, and had gone to such lengths to conceal them, indicated she was involved in something beyond mere reporting.

And what's more, judging by what the devices were made up to look like, I knew who she'd planned to use them on. The cigar band was obviously intended to be used on Magnotta. And the eyeball? Well, it was a safe bet that Clare Burton had a model of a human head, brain exposed, somewhere in her office or lab. I tried not to linger over the ironic fact that it was now Catherine's head that lay exposed before the good doctor.

But the long and the short of it was that, as if trying to track a serial killer wasn't enough, I felt once more the full impact of what I was up against—something intensely intricate and mysterious, something that seemed like it was sucking in a lot of players, something high-tech and secretive and, most of all, deadly. Seeing those things told me I didn't know Catherine as intimately as I thought I did. Either she was more devious than I'd known, or more desperate. Either way, her actions were just as hard to fathom as Burton's, or Falconetti's, or Magnotta's. I'd never felt so on guard in my life.

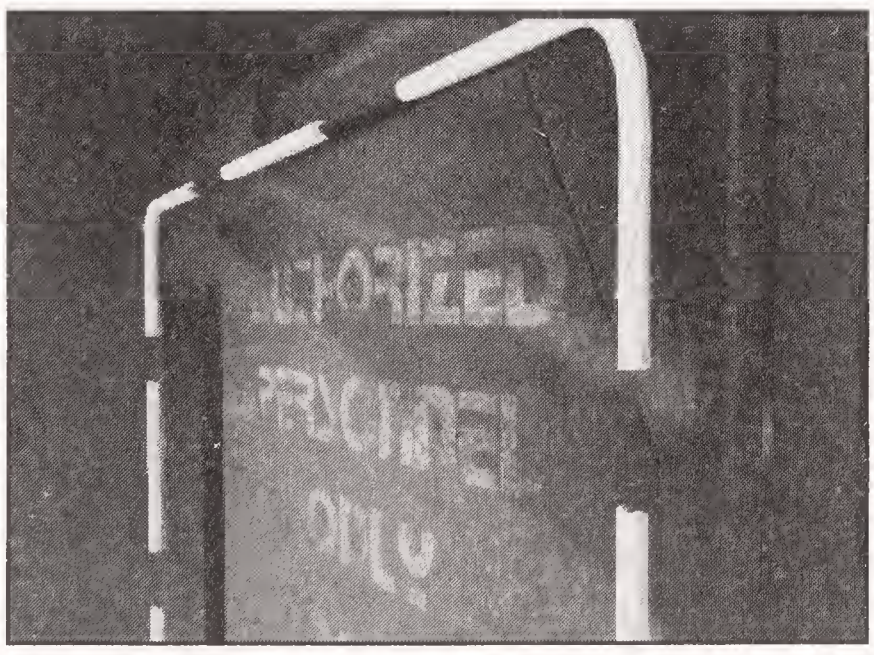
I slipped the bugs in my pocket and headed back out into the night. For all my ranting about ethics, it was becoming clearer and clearer to me that there weren't any rules anymore. I was going to have to fight fire with fire. I already had some ideas about using those devices myself. Not for reporting purposes, though. As I said, that's unethical. I planned to use them to catch a killer, and maybe save my life in the process.

Chapter 19

BUG ON THE WALL

It was another one of those instances where it was better not to think. Catherine's little secrets had given me a chance to find out about some other people's little secrets, and I intended to take advantage of that. Better still, I'd placed a call to Soap Beatty, asked him about the bugs, and found out they were the very latest—they were both audio and visual, and could be coded to key in on a particular combination of voices. In other words, I could fix it so whenever any combination of Burton, Magnotta, and Falconetti got together for a little chat—which I suspected was more regularly than they let on—I'd get the signal on my WAC and become the proverbial fly on the wall.

I was climbing the steps to the precinct house before I stopped to catch my breath. But I decided I didn't need any breath. I had to plant a bug in Magnotta's office, and I had to do it now. I wasn't going to get anywhere until I knew what was going on behind some closed doors.



Luckily, Magnotta was in the interrogation room, which I was beginning to think was his favorite place in the whole world. No doubt he'd be in there for hours. Still, I had embarked on a dangerous enterprise. I figured I'd better

make sure he was in the middle of something that was going to go on for a while.

There was a small room next to the interrogation room that I knew was an observation area, where you could view ongoing interrogations via a two-way mirror. I stuck my head in, saw it was empty, and moved to the glass partition.

Magnotta was in there with an attractive young woman who was obviously a lady of the evening.

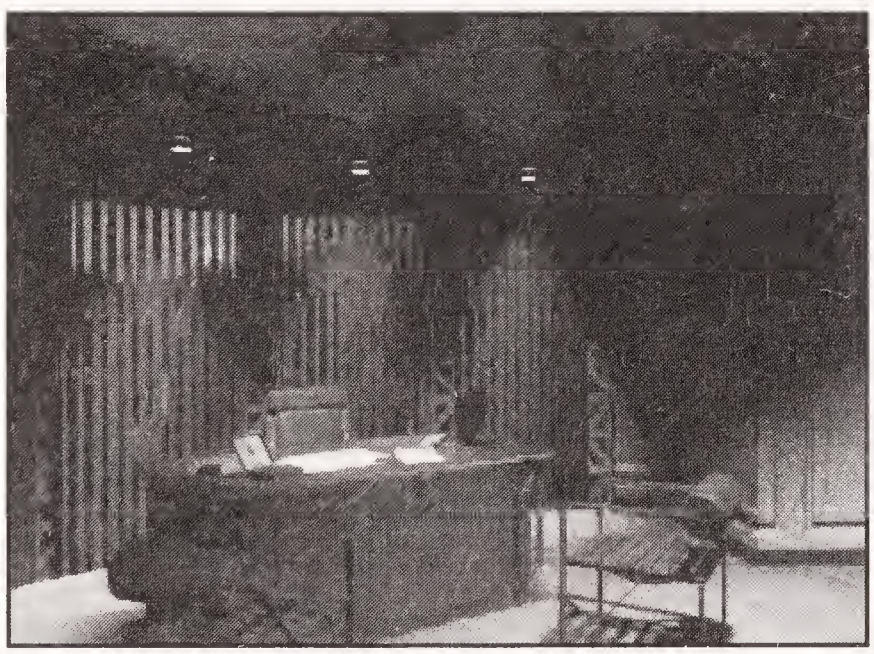
It gave me a chill to see one of the people I suspected of being the Ripper alone with a prostitute. The original Jack, after all, had specialized in streetwalkers. I lingered for a moment, suddenly too nervous to leave, even though it was evident that Magnotta wasn't going to return to his office for a while.

I hadn't been there for more than a moment before he had her in tears. Although it was clear that the interrogation was just beginning, it had gotten very intense very quickly. The woman pleaded with Magnotta to tell her what he wanted from her—she had no idea why she was being questioned. Apparently she'd been busted before and never been questioned, just booked. But then Magnotta told her what he wanted. He began loosening his belt as he made

his way to his side of the glass and deactivated it. I didn't have to see anything to know what was going to happen next, however. I heard a muted wail from the hooker; then it went silent.

I was stunned. Even for Magnotta, this was too much. He was even worse than I'd understood. It became even more imperative for me to plant the bug, but I stood there for a moment, anyway, sickened and trying to think of some way to help that woman. I thought of running to Lou Brannon's desk and telling him Magnotta was in the process of raping a suspect in the interrogation room, but I knew no one would believe this, not even the guys who worked with the bastard.

It was agonizing, but I was finally able to wrench myself away by telling myself that at that moment, I was the only one who could stop Magnotta. And I had the tools in my pocket. I made my way to his office, went directly to his desk, and forced myself to focus on the task at hand.



I saw the perfect place to hide the bug after a moment—his cigar box. I planted it, left his office, stopped off at the men's room to throw up my dinner, and left the station house, feeling more sure than ever that I knew who the Ripper was, and hoping that poor woman back in the interrogation room would forgive me.

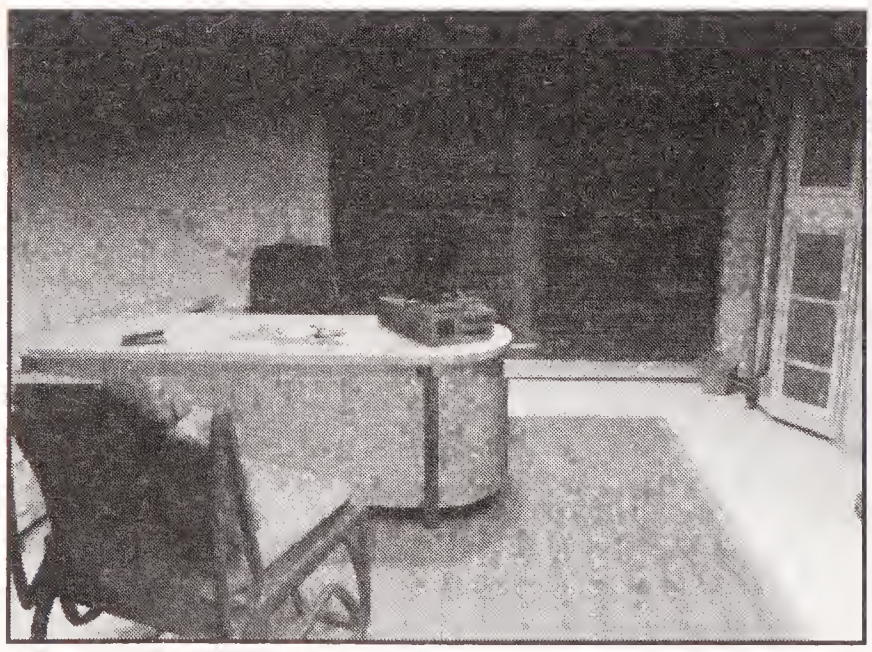
At the Meta-Cog, I finally stopped to catch my breath. I didn't know my way around that place as well as I did the precinct house. I wasn't even sure Burton had an appropriate place to hide the device—I'd never been in her office, so I was banking on the hope that I'd read Catherine's intentions correctly, something I hadn't been doing very well lately.

I was also counting on a little luck. I knew that, to get into Burton's office, I'd probably need to swipe another swipe card. For that, I was counting on the continuing interest of the comely Vivien Santiago.

But she got a phone call, and I spotted it: a swipe card sitting in her in basket. I slipped it in my pocket and headed up the elevator.

Luck stayed with me as I got to Burton's office and no one answered my knock. I used the card on the door and slipped inside. As soon as I entered, I saw that, for once, I'd read Catherine perfectly—there was a skinless head sitting on the doctor's shelf. I went right to it, yanked out its eye, and jabbed the eye-bug into the gaping socket. It was a perfect fit. Catherine must have had it tailored. I stood back to admire it for a moment. You couldn't tell the difference.

I didn't admire it for long, however. There's something about gazing into unblinking eyes—especially when they can't blink because they have no lids. Let's just say I blinked first.



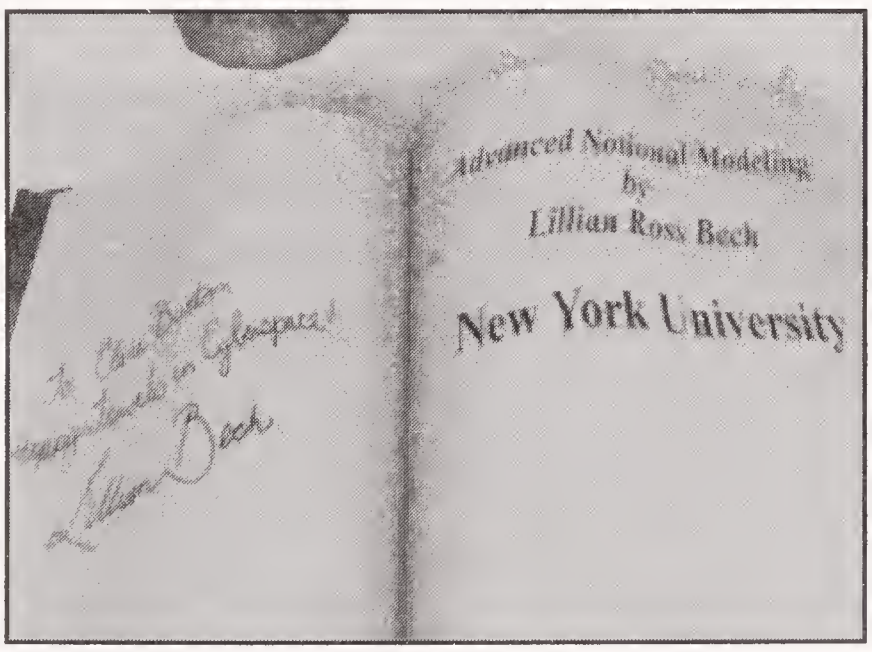
Still, it was an accomplishment. Before leaving, I decided to take advantage of the moment's solitude to check my WAC. I wanted to see

how the deciphering of Catherine's notebook entries was going. But there was nothing more yet. Glancing at the already decoded messages, however, I saw the one she'd written about Burton, which I'd nearly forgotten. I went to the bookshelf to look for *Advanced Notional Mapping*.

When I found it, I opened it to see that—just as Catherine had described in her notes—it was inscribed by the author, one Lillian Bech.

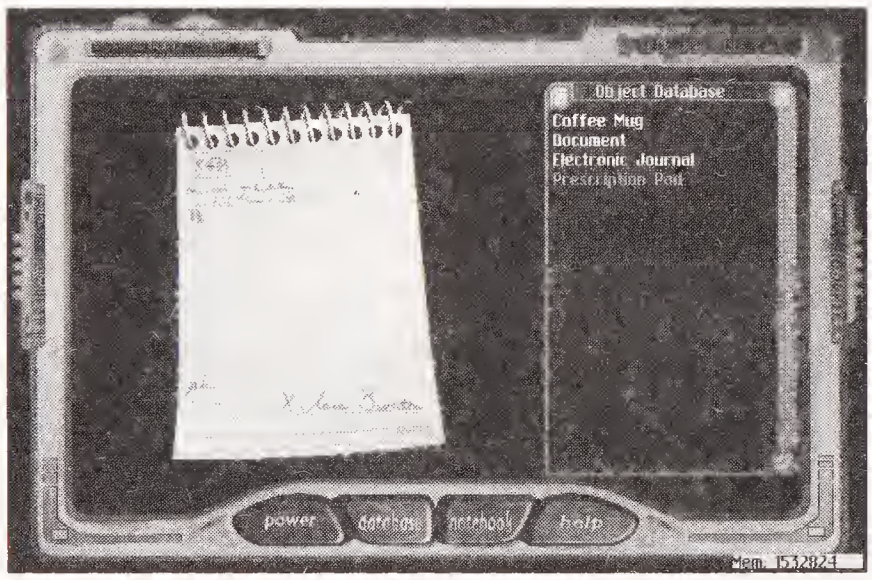
Catherine had been right about it being a slim lead, too. Still, the dust jacket copy said this Bech person was a professor at NYU, where I knew Clare Burton had gone to school; if Burton had been her student, as the inscription seemed to indicate, it would be worth my while to talk to Lillian Bech. Maybe she could give me some info about Burton's past—which, I had a feeling, would also turn out to involve Falconetti, and maybe Magnotta, and who knows who else?

I made a final sweep of the room to make sure I wasn't missing anything useful. On Burton's desk, I found a pad of blank prescriptions. The top one was signed. That certainly fell under the category of useful. I pocketed it, then turned for the door … and stopped again. I looked back at the desktop. Burton had left what looked like a "to-do" list



for herself. I picked it up.

"E-mail George Rhodes," said item number one. I thought I knew the name, and after a moment's consideration, it came to me: I'd seen it on Catherine's Rolodex. I read on. Item number two pointed out that Magnotta was a maniac and she should keep him away from Catherine. No argument there. Number three was a reminder to keep "Joey" out of it; Magnotta would be expecting her to bring him in. Four and five concerned Vic Farley—Burton wanted to examine the Stein corpse, but not with Farley around, and she also wanted to "keep a lid on" him in general. Considering she'd fired him, I'd say that mission was accomplished already. The last item was a reminder for her to keep her appointment at the gym.

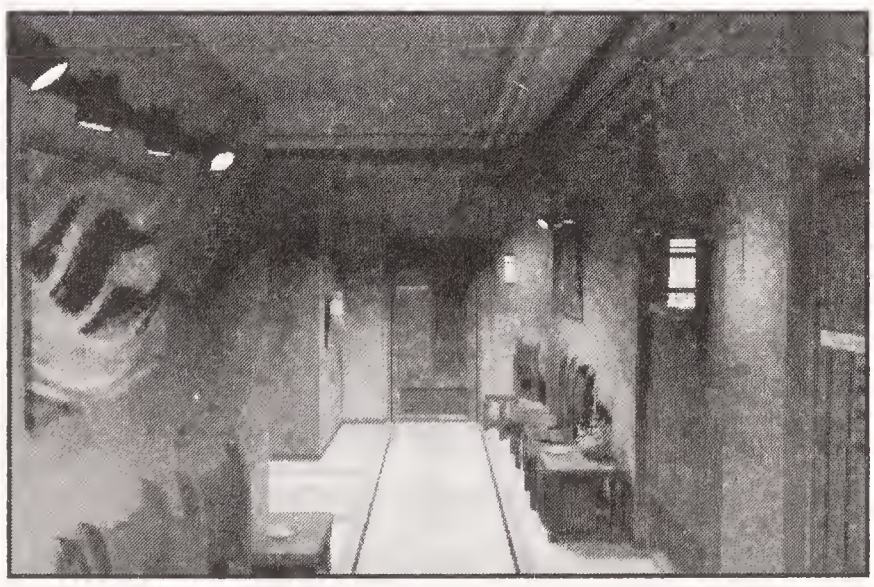


I'd gotten more than I'd bargained for, and the bugs hadn't even kicked in yet. I decided to start with Professor Lillian Bech.

Chapter 20

A NOT-SO-SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION

I told myself that there was at least an outside chance that Lillian Bech would be able to help me find the link between all the suspects. It didn't seem very likely, though, and all the way to the NYU campus I had to struggle to keep myself on remote control, to think of myself as a kind of journalistic attack dog. I had to get something out of Bech, I told myself again and again figuring all the while that she would be some haughty old dame creaking in her shoes, the memories of thousands of students clamoring for attention in her mind ... she probably wouldn't remember Burton from Adam. At the same time, all the frustrations of the case were accumulating and modulating into a fiery anger. I was so hot for somebody to tell me what was going on that I was afraid I might slap the old broad around until she told me something.



There's something about being in a school, however, that puts even the most aggressive s.o.b. on his best behavior. The halls had the hush of a church about them as I made my way to her office. My angry stalk became a more hesitant stride. I felt

out of place, felt passing students looking at me. I got to her door and knocked politely, and when she called out for me to come in, I became even more restrained as I realized that she wasn't quite what I'd been expecting. In fact, given the state I was in, I'd say I was closer to senility than she was.

There was no doubt that—pardon the pun—Professor Lillian Bech still had control of all her faculties. She was a dapper, elegant woman of late middle age, sitting in an office packed with books and papers and ornate diplomas and certificates. The place reeked of scholarship. Speaking on the phone when I walked in, she was apparently dealing with a student who was trying to pitch her a line of bull, and she had the restrained expression of a lion momentarily amused by a mouse that thinks it has the upper hand. Just the way she talked told me that she could articulate the most obscure, abstract thought in a way that I could never approach. There'd be no slapping this source around, verbally or otherwise.

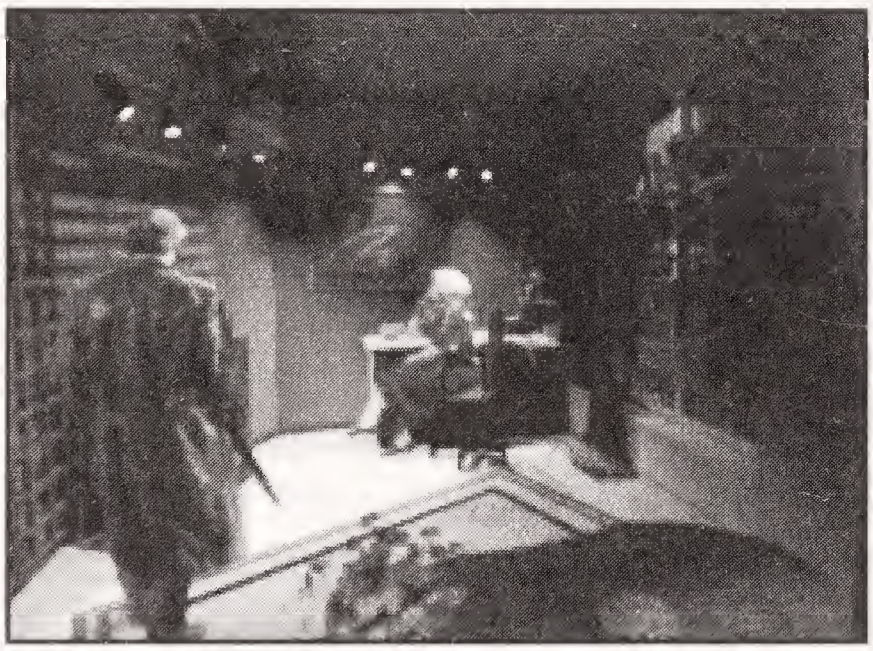
Handset clamped to one ear—the kid on the other end of the line was apparently laying it on thick—she raised an eyebrow at me. She sighed, either at the fact that her caller wouldn't shut up, or perhaps because she knew she was going to have to shut him or her down. She indicated to me that I should sit down. Then she leaned into the telephone.

"Mr. Wendell," she began, and I knew the kid was going to get it. "Mr. Wendell, in my day, we had a term, 'zooming.' It referred to that time when you're young and you think you're the first person to discover cyberspace. May I suggest that for now you limit your

ramblings to the assignment given in class? ... I see. You missed that class, too. Well then, we're not talking about 'zooming,' we're talking about something known as 'failing.' I expect your work on my desk in the morning, Mr. Wendell. Good day."

And with that, she hung up. I could hear the kid's voice coming out of the ear piece as she put the phone down. He was saying, "But Professor—"

I nearly flinched when she swiveled in her chair to face me. I quickly identified myself and asked her if she remembered a student named Clare Burton. I wasn't surprised when she said she did; I'd quickly come to realize that this woman had a mind like a steel trap.



"The only student I ever encouraged to leave school," she said, which made me wish I'd had teachers like her.

Still, I was taken aback. "You advised a student to leave school?" I sputtered.

"Frankly, this place had nothing to offer her. It could even have restricted her."

I got the picture: Burton had been too smart. I realized that it was a good thing after all that I hadn't had teachers like this. I probably would have been more like the twerp on the phone.

All right, so Bech had been impressed with her former student's intellect. I wondered what she'd think of her now—if she thought her handling of Catherine's case was as strange as I thought it was. Maybe Burton had changed from a diligent, conscientious brainiac to a hesitant, secretive squirrel for a reason, a reason Bech could tell me about.

As it turned out, Burton had always been weird.

"She's always been quirky," Bech told me. "She wouldn't look at things the way most surgeons do. That's what makes her so creative, so imaginative. You have no need for concern."

Her answer was a two-sided coin—on the one hand, it put me somewhat at ease about Catherine's prospects, but on the other hand it didn't get me any closer to figuring out Burton's hidden agenda. I decided to change directions and ask Bech if she ever had a student named Joey Falconetti. And it was in this manner, sitting there frustrated over my inability to get what I came for, that I almost missed the fact that I'd hit pay dirt—big time.

Falconetti hadn't been Bech's student, but she sure remembered him. Remembered that even as a kid, he'd been an astonishingly talented cyber-surfer, the kind of guy a young, aggressive Clare Burton would have been intrigued by, the kind of guy she might have had an affair with, the kind of guy she would have formed a group called the Web Runners with.

"The what?" I asked, stirring from my funk.

"The Web Runners," Bech said so matter-of-factly it made me feel as if I hadn't done my homework. "It was a gaming club of some sort. It seemed like playing to me, but I have to admit the technology was cutting-edge, exciting. Clare

and Falconetti were among the founding members. In fact, when she left school, she seemed to do nothing else."

"Does the club still exist?" I asked, excited now. "Where can I find it?"

"Oh, they're like children with a secret clubhouse," Bech replied. "All I know is that they post notice of their meetings on the electronic bulletin board out in the hallway—encoding it amongst the fliers and announcements. You have to know how to arrange the fliers in order to make a sentence that says where and when they'll be meeting next. God knows why they don't just tell each other."

I don't know why, but this little bit of info seemed like a gold mine to me. It could be nothing, but Professor Bech seemed impressed by the work Burton and Falconetti had done with this group, and for some reason I suspected that the key to whatever was going on between those two had to do with this secret club. And why had they kept it secret, anyway?

I nearly bolted from my seat to reach that bulletin board. Luckily, I had the presence of mind to ask her one more question.

"You ever hear of a guy named Vince Magnotta?" I asked.

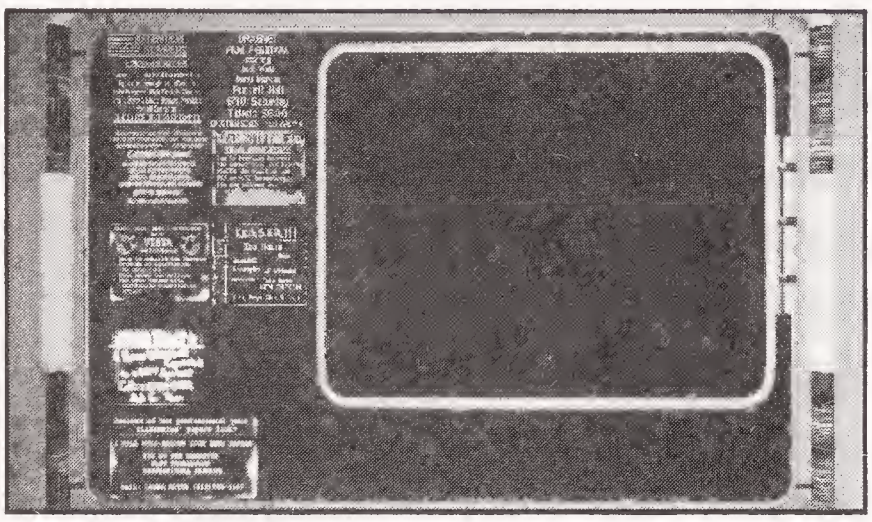
"Clare used to mention him," Bech said. "Apparently he had quite a temper."

I laughed. "Right," I said. "And does a bear—well, never mind. Thanks."

I was headed for the bulletin board, feeling like I'd just scored a goal in overtime. So the unholy trio had all known each other since college. What had kept them connected for all these years? I had the feeling it had something to do with the Web Runners, and I was bound and determined to find out.

Chapter 21

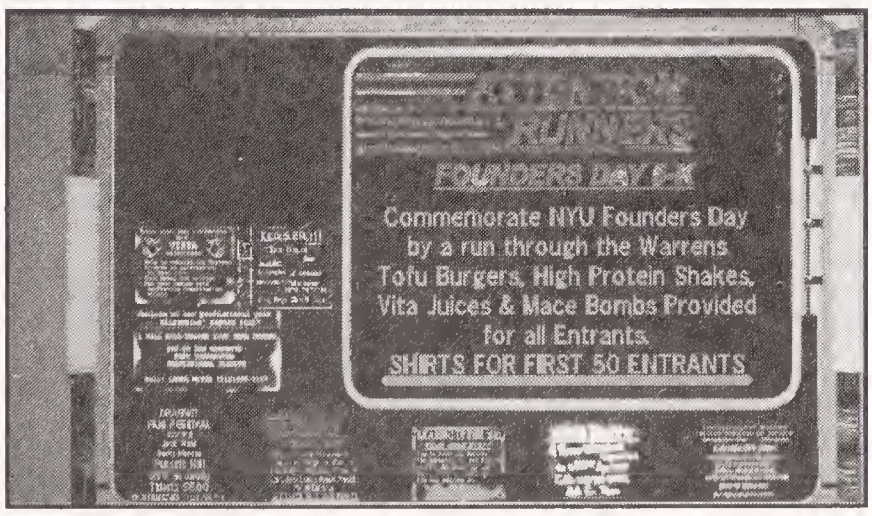
A KILLER DANCER



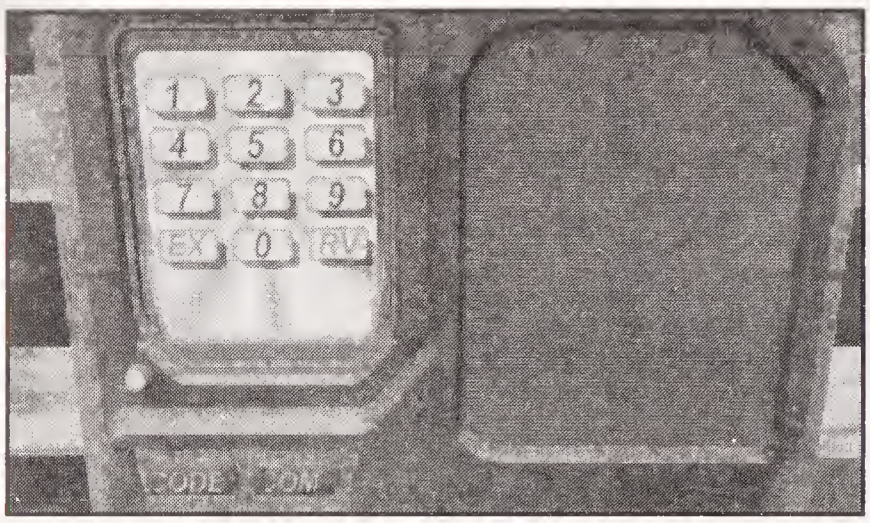
It didn't take very long to arrange the electronic notices on the bulletin board into some semblance of order. I clicked through the various announcements of keggers and offers to holo-record term papers and pleas to volunteer, volunteer until I had an arrangement that revealed one, single, stark piece of grammar—a sentence. I stared at it, double-checking myself. "Meeting at former warehouse on Grammercy Street," it said.

I stared at the board to make sure I wasn't missing anything else. I noticed that each one of the pages I'd rearranged had numbers on them. I wrote the numbers down, just in case. It wouldn't be the first combination I'd found by accident that day.

Then, racing now, my nostrils flaring like a bloodhound sniffing a scent lost days ago, I made my way to the former warehouse on Grammercy Street.



It was in a neighborhood that had once been elegant, then given over to warehouses and freight businesses, then revived briefly when artists



discovered all the loft space; then, finally, it had crumbled altogether. Now it was one of those neighborhoods you didn't want to be in at night. Of course, it was nighttime, and there I was.

The door was locked, but thanks to my trusty reporter's instincts, I had no trouble getting in—the numbers I'd noticed on the bulletin board outside Bech's office were, indeed, the combination. I slipped my notebook into my pocket, appreciating the fact that simple and nonstop note-taking pays off more often than you'd think. Then I entered the place—slowly. People have a tendency to get annoyed when you break their supposedly unbreakable codes, especially when you show it off by prancing into their living rooms.

Except this wasn't a living room—it was a large storage area with thirty-foot ceilings and long, tall windows, most of which were papered over. There were some odd decorating touches. There were the de rigueur crates, apparently unmoved and untouched since the previous tenants had abandoned the place. The scant furnishings looked like they'd been picked up from charity shops, or the streets in front of college dormitories.

Technological gewgaws, however, were everywhere, and looked not only new but state-of-the-art. Just like college kids, I thought—they never have enough money to pay their rent, but they always seem to have money for beer and computer games.

And standing in the middle of it all was a beautiful young Asian woman in a punk-style decking headset. She was oblivious to my presence, moving like a martial arts ballerina on drugs, and I wondered what game she was playing. Something from long ago, invented by one of the unholy trio? I wondered.

I stood there for a moment, surveying the room to make sure there was no one else there, then I found myself staring at the young woman who seemed lost in cyberspace. It was a pleasant interlude, like watching an exotic dancer all by yourself. Not that I ever do that sort of thing.

I don't know how long I stared at her, but eventually, I found myself staring past her, reexamining the room more slowly. I had the feeling I'd missed something, like I was seeing something but at the same time not seeing it. That's when I spotted it—some pictures and cyber-renderings on a wall in the far corner, arranged not for show but in a manner that resembled a hall of fame exhibit. I took another look at the Asian woman. Her hands and legs were intricately involved, but I couldn't tell what she was doing. Whatever it was, it was keeping her preoccupied. I stepped over to examine some of the pictures.

They say the normal museum visitor spends an average of twenty seconds in front of each picture. I must have spent twenty minutes in

front of the first one alone. I was riveted. It was a picture of Magnotta, Burton, and Falconetti. Together. A long time ago.

So they had all definitely known each other. Not only known each other, but been friends. Good friends.

There were other pictures of them, too, alone and in different configurations of people. In each one, they looked at least fifteen years younger, healthier, happier; cocky, like kids who think they own the world, kids who still think they're immortal.

Some of the other pictures put the lie to that; there were faces there that looked familiar, although it took me a while to place them. When I did, I still wasn't sure I was right, but it was enough to spook me—some of the faces bore uncanny resemblances to the Ripper's murder victims.

It was time to ask some questions and get some answers. I went up to the woman in the middle of the room and made her aware of my presence by yanking off her deck set.

She yelped, and for a minute I thought she was going to pull some kind of martial arts move on me—place her foot upside my ear or some such. I had a move of my own lined up, which was to flex my leg muscles in preparation for running like hell. But she was too woozy from coming out of cyberspace, and by the time she recovered her equilibrium, there I was, looming over her by a foot or two.

Chapter 21

"Oh, man!" she exclaimed. "You almost gave me a stroke! I was doing the Custer sim, man, and I was the only Korean Indian, and I had Goldie Locks by the throat, and—"

And here I'd been thinking she was a ballerina. It made me think how poorly I perceived a woman's body language, which reminded me of Catherine, which made me come down on the Korean woman a little harder than was probably necessary.

I told her who I was and what I was doing and she seemed to take in the seriousness of it all. She became, if not agreeable, at least intimidated into talking.

She said her name was Kashi Yamamoto and, sure enough, she was a Web Runner.

"You know a former Web Runner named Clare Burton?" I asked.

"Sure," she said. "Or at least, I know who she is, or who she was—one of the first Web Runners. You can see her pictures, hanging on our walls over there. We care about our history, man."

She knew about Falconetti, too.

"He's a legend," she said, with more than a tinge of awe in her voice. "I mean, even before he started the Web Runners, they say he phracked that TRW gig."

She'd inadvertently touched on one of my pet peeves. "I'm sorry," I said. "See, I'm a writer and I have this thing for proper English … ."

"He wiped out the credit record of every adult on the East Coast," she explained. "Cops never got him."

"Speaking of cops, what about a guy named Vince Magnotta?" I tried.

"Sounds familiar, but you'd have to grep—eh, you have to access the Web Runners archives to see if he was one of us."

"You people keep archives?"

"I told you, we care about our history, man. But you can take a look. The WELL address is Anachrony Station. The ICE is a bitch, though."

The kid was being so helpful I backed down. Despite the hokey cyber-jargon, you have to appreciate kids who are smart enough to appreciate history. Especially if the history they appreciate fills you in on some history you lack. I thanked her for the password and told her I was sorry to have snuck up on her.

"Go back to Custer," I told her. "He deserved it."

She smiled and told me to come back anytime. Then she put her visor back on, and commenced her beautiful dance once more, while in her mind she hacked people to death.

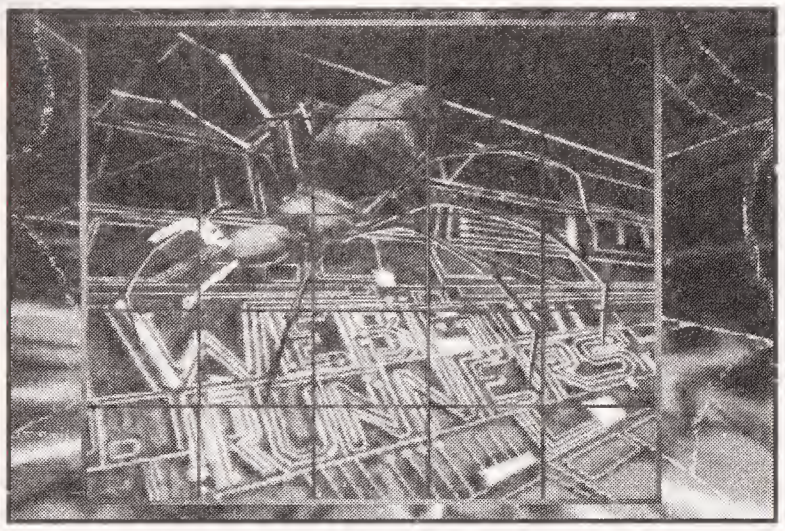
I left, headed for my decking outfit back in the newsroom, wondering if I danced like that when I was in cyberspace.

Chapter 22

ALL WEBBED UP AND NO PLACE TO GO

IT was nice to be back in cyberspace, where at least I had an excuse for the feeling of having my skin crawl. Walking back into the newsroom, I'd tried to look straight ahead. People seemed to be looking at me funny, as if they'd just been kvetching to each other about me. I suppose it was the normal grumbling about my supposed special status, but in my paranoid state I suspected them of knowing how much trouble I was having with the story, of my personal involvement with it, of how thin my articles on the case had been lately. A reporter with a shorter track record would have been booted to writing living obits, they were probably saying to themselves. They didn't see, I knew, that that was exactly what I was working on, or so I thought—living obituaries, the things you write ahead of time knowing you're going to have to use them some day. And it was getting to me.

In any case, I'd gone straight to my desk, decked in, and swooped into Anachrony Station easily enough, and was surprised to see that the fearsome ICE Kashi Yamamoto had warned me about was no bitch—it was a kid's tile puzzle, easily solved by simply rearranging the tiles to form one, coherent image—in this case, that of the Web Runners' logo. I guess they wanted people to have fairly easy access to their archives. No sense having archives if no one ever sees them.



Once inside the WELL, the club's openness became even more admirable—it seems there'd been some embarrassing and sad and even devastating moments in the history of the Web Runners; it was one of those moments in particular that sent a bolt of lightning down my spine …

But I'm getting ahead of myself now. The chilling feeling of grim discovery came on more slowly than that. It started when I discovered that the "archive" in the Web Runners' WELL was a bank of video monitors that, when individually activated, emanated audio information files concerning the people pictured. And what was so chilling was, as I activated the monitors one by one, I saw face after face that I slowly recognized as having grown up to appear in my own news stories: It started with a youthful photo of Renee Stein, followed by a teenaged and grinning Sam Mendler, and then by Victor Estevez … . What I'd begun to suspect back in the loft had turned out to be true: All of the Ripper's victims had been founding members of the Web Runners more than fifteen years ago.

But there was more than that: So had my leading suspects, Burton, Magnotta, and Falconetti.

And then there was a face that was new to me, although the name attached to it made me blink in surprise: Josie Dorsett—the name engraved on the handle of the laser cane I'd found back in Catherine's apartment.

I knew at this point that I was on to something big. Clearly, whatever was going on had started, somehow, right here in this

collection of innocent young faces. The evil, the killing—it had started with the Web Runners.

I felt a strange kind of energy lick through me like an electrical fire; I wanted to lean forward and watch in fascination, while at the same time my discovery made me nervous, and I kept one eye over my shoulder. Because while things still weren't clear to me, I knew I was looking at the face of the Ripper … and people who'd seen that face seemed, inevitably, to end up dead.

Dorsett's wasn't the only face that was new to me, however. There was one other founding member whom I hadn't seen—or even heard of—before: somebody named Stephanie Jordan. I took note of her name; if she wasn't dead already, it seemed certain to me that she could either give me some leads on my top three suspects … or maybe she was a suspect herself.

If I'd been riveted by the photos, it was the audio-text that held me spellbound. From the start, the seemingly minor biographical information was enough to help me confirm some suspicions. I learned, for example, that the thuggish Vince Magnotta was actually a sophisticated master of cyberspace "second only to Joey Falconetti"—just as I'd come to suspect from the devious encryption he'd put on Catherine's notebook, and the slick ICE he'd used to cloak her WELL.

But there were bigger discoveries than that to be made; I learned to my utter astonishment that Joey Falconetti and Clare Burton had once been married—to each other. Shocking as it was, it put their rancorous behavior toward each other in a certain perspective—they *did* fight like a married couple, with the casual hostility that was the hallmark of miserable marriages everywhere. As if that weren't shock enough, however, the info files went on to add a kinky element.

It seems that Burton and Falconetti's wedding ceremony had been interrupted by a full-scale brawl, a brawl that was instigated

by none other than the young Vince Magnotta. Claiming to be in love with the bride, he'd apparently tried to kill the groom with his bare hands. They'd had to cart him off, but he'd apparently taken down a few intervening ushers before they got ahold of him. Then he'd come back to crash the reception, too, and in more ways than one.

Things were beginning to fall into place, and in a way I'd never imagined. A motive was finally, suddenly, beginning to take shape, and it was the most classic motive of them all: the love triangle. There's nothing like love to lead to death.

Which, in the course of my archival discoveries anyway, is exactly the path I found myself to be following: First I found out about love, then I found out about death. I discovered that the enigmatic Josie Dorsett—owner of the laser cane before Catherine—was dead, and that she had died under what the file termed "very mysterious circumstances."

From there, things began to steamroll. While the file said nothing more about *how* Dorsett had actually died, it did give me bits and pieces of enough seemingly relevant information to cobble together a theory. For I also learned that, soon after Dorsett's death, several interesting things happened.

Joey Falconetti was arrested for murder, for one thing. By a young cop named Vince Magnotta, for another. And the Burton-Falconetti marriage dissolved soon thereafter, for a third.

Then I discovered that the case against Falconetti had been dismissed—when it was uncovered that the evidence against him had been fabricated.

Had Josie Dorsett been murdered, and was she the one Falconetti had been arrested for supposedly killing? Had he indeed committed the crime and gotten off on a technicality, or was Magnotta guilty of setting him up in yet another vicious attempt to break up his marriage? And what had happened when Falconetti had gotten off, only to find his marriage destroyed anyway?

Chapter 22

The questions were flying at me like bullets from a machine gun, and I felt like I was in motion as well. I was really getting someplace now. But then I hit a wall—the files told me nothing more about any of this. The most crucial element, the information that might have helped me put it all together—the circumstances under which Dorsett had died—was missing.

Or was it? There was one more thing to learn about in the archives, something that might give meaning to the whole sordid string of events. It seems that, around the time of Josie Dorsett's death, the Web Runners had been caught up in a new role-playing game of their own devising, a game they had soon thereafter quit playing. The game was called *Ripper.*

Although the file didn't say so, it was easy to imagine what the game had been like: a reenactment of the greatest unsolved murder case of all time, with players assuming the roles of the real-life historical figures who'd been involved in the original case in London in 1888. The young coders—all of the Runners had been highly inventive and talented programmers, according to their files—had no doubt constructed a grid map of Whitechapel, the Ripper's stalking grounds on London's west side, and populated it with proper Victorian personages … Scotland Yard inspectors, pub crawlers, prostitutes, the original Jack's preferred victims, johns looking for a toss … and, of course, Jack himself.

To be accurate—and I had no doubt that the fetishist young Web Runners had been sticklers for accuracy—the programming would have had to allow for any possibility, including that your character might not outwit the Ripper—that is, that you would be killed. Under normal circumstances, this would mean you'd be booted out. But could it have been that, one night, the programming had booted someone out permanently—someone like Josie Dorsett?

This of course was impossible. I'd had some applications drive me to near suicide, but however bad the programming was, it

couldn't kill you. But could it be that someone had taken this creepy game to their black heart, and killed Dorsett while she was playing it?

If so, the lack of information about her death indicated one thing for sure—virtual Jack, like his namesake, had gotten away.

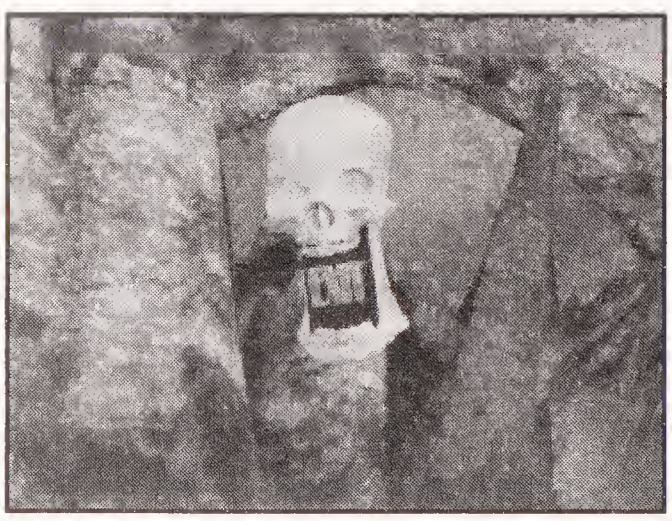
If my hypothesis was correct, the whole thing had an resonated eerily with the current case. I had to track it down, but how?

I went over everything again, searching for some way to revisit a fifteen-year-old case. Asking my three principals, I knew, would only lead to more obfuscation. I had to find another angle. I checked the Dorsett bio once again and found she'd left an ex-husband and a teenaged daughter; but the file didn't even give their names, let alone any hint of where I could find them.

The only file that offered the remotest possibility of hope was that of the one person I hadn't heard of before—Stephanie Jordan. Unfortunately, there was no information on how to find her, either. I was stumped—on fire with theories, energized as a race horse restrained in the starting gate, but stumped nonetheless.

My mind was saturated with Web Runners, Web Runners, Web Runners as I booted out of the archives and sailed back toward my decking port. At the same time, however, I already felt the acute misery I knew was going to overtake me when I landed like a lump back at my desk—the misery of not having anywhere to go in search of Stephanie Jordan.

Amidst the overload, however, I did have one positive thought:



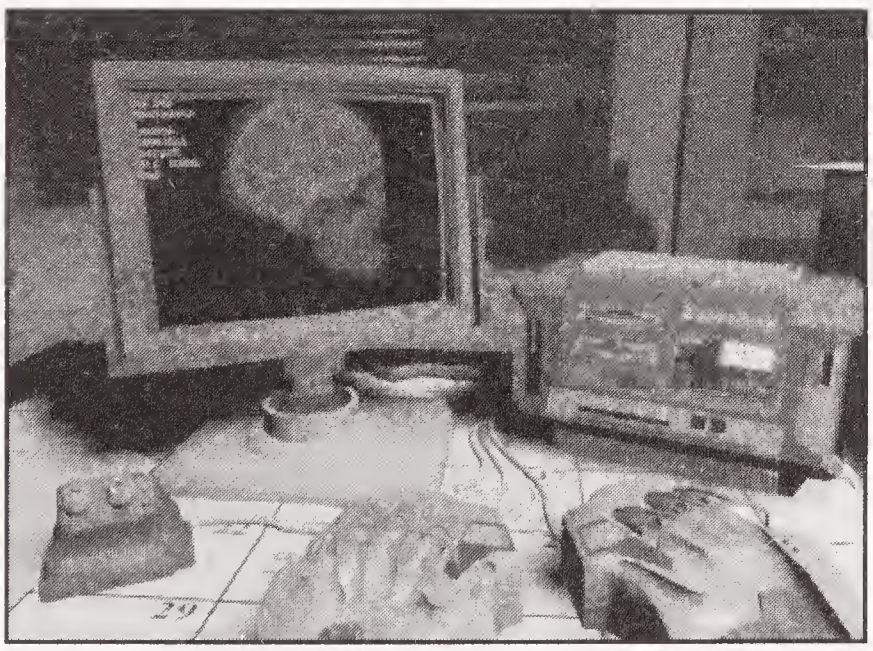
What I'd learned had certainly cleared Catherine of being anything other than an overly aggressive cub reporter. It was obvious to me now that the ongoing serial killings had their origins in this long ago game, a game that had tried to make fun out of murder. I've always said you have to be a little sick to be a gamer.

Chapter 23

MURDER AT THE OK CORRAL

FOR all the wealth of information I'd uncovered in the Web Runners' archive, I felt no sense of accomplishment, just an increasingly grim determination to see this one through to the end. This was in no small part because I realized that I was now in the same position Catherine had been in—close to the killer. And look what happened to her.

It had me spooked, truth be told, and as I recovered at my desk—woozy, trying to shake off the aftereffects of my c-space journey—I was trying already to figure out the quickest way to contact Stephanie Jordan. I jumped a mile when my WAC rang, then grumbled as I fished it out of my pocket. I had no time to talk. Not, that is, until I saw who was calling me: somebody named Stephanie Jordan.



She was completely panicked.

"Professor Bech contacted me and told me you were asking about the Ripper," she said. "I—I'm in terrible danger."

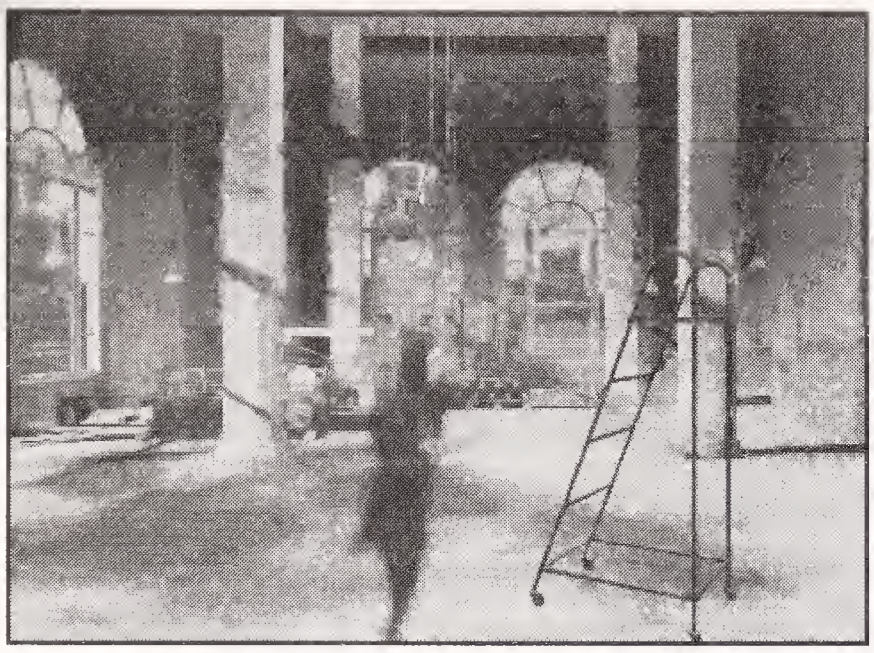
I sat up straight, woozy no more. "Tell me," I said quickly.

"Not over this thing," she said. "It's not secure. Meet me at the Web Runners' loft. Hurry. There's something in cyberspace I want to show you. It will change everything you know about the Ripper. Hurry."

She rang off before I could get in another word, but it was enough to have me in motion even before the signal faded on the WAC's monitor. I raced out of the newsroom into the hallway and pounded the button for the elevator, locking my eyes on the ascending numbers as the car rose to meet me. It was enough time for me to consider that this could be a setup. I reflected for a moment that perhaps Catherine had gotten a similar call from Jordan before charging out of the newsroom that fateful night. Then the elevator arrived and I knew that I, too, had to take the chance. I stepped in the elevator and hit the button, then felt my stomach clutch as the car sank. Nonetheless, I hit the pavement running.

Then spent the next hour leaning forward in the back seat of a cab, pounding the seat, begging the cabbie to try this way, then that, throwing bills into the front seat and ordering him to run this light and jump that curb; all to no avail. We were stuck in gridlock, and by the time we got to Gramercy Street it was too late. I saw the strobe lights of the police hovercrafts beating down the street as we pulled up in front of the warehouse.

I pulled a wad of money out of my wallet and threw it into the front seat, then jumped out of the cab before it had come to a full stop. I raced into the building and up the stairs, a terrible keening echoing down the hollow, wooden stairwell all around me. It seemed to rise to a crescendo as I threw open the door to



the loft and saw Kashi Yamamoto, crying her eyes out, her blood-smeared decking visor at her feet.

"The cops just took the body," she sobbed hysterically. "Oh God, it was awful, so awful—I was decked in, reliving the gunfight at the OK Corral, and I felt all this wet stuff hit me, and I thought it was part of the game!"

She sagged nearly to her knees and I had to help her up. I rubbed her back until she seemed to regain some control. But there was no controlling the images in her head, decking visor or no.

"When I took my helmet off, she was just there!" she blurted. "She was all cut up and her eyes—her eyes—"

"Okay now," I told her. "Take it slow."

But I could see the impact of the memory welling up in her own eyes.

"Her eyes were staring at me!" she nearly screamed. "But I didn't do it! There wasn't even anybody else here, I didn't see anybody, I—"

"Nobody suspects you of anything, do you hear me?" I told her.

I managed to calm her down a bit more, and slowly got out of her that Jordan had spoken to her, but hadn't revealed any secrets. Afterwards, the police had gotten Stephanie's body out of

there so quickly you'd think they were trying to cover up a UFO crash. Karl Stasiak would have never allowed such a rush job. I guess all the replacement cops Magnotta kept shifting onto his team didn't know any better. But what did it matter? The Ripper never left any clues, anyway.

I found a blanket for Kashi and wrapped it around her, hoping it would help alleviate the shivers wracking her entire body. It didn't seem to do any good. She collapsed onto one of the beat-up sofas and curled into the fetal position. She said she had no family to go to. She wanted to wait there for her friends to show up. She kept her eyes covered, and I knew why—there were blood stains everywhere, the terrible splattering I'd gotten too used to myself. The wild west would never be the same for poor Kashi.

I was still there with her when my WAC signaled me. I pulled it out to see Vince Magnotta's smirking face.

Chapter 23

"They say the bad guys always return to the scene of the crime," he said. "But you're a little late, aren't you Quinlan? Never thought I'd see you miss a story."

I was in no mood for his nonsense. "Why'd you remove the body so quickly, Magnotta?" I demanded. "The public has a right to know what happened."

"Oh yeah?" he replied smugly. "Well, let's make sure we tell them everything—like how you were the last person Jordan contacted before she got killed. Just like you were the last to see Catherine Powell. Makes you wonder, doesn't it?"

I was working up a full head of steam in reaction to his tactics, but I wasn't blind to the fact that Magnotta evidently had his own surveillance devices. "If you know she contacted me," I said, "then you also know it was out of the blue. I want to see her body."

"Hey, Quinlan," Magnotta said, and I could see him leaning back from his receiver. "I think we got a bad connection. I got to go. But don't worry—I'm watching you. From here on out, I'm going to be watching you very closely."

And then the monitor went dead.

I had no doubt that he would be watching me. Clearly, he had been all along. And it would be just like him to try to pin the murders on me. What a high-profile bust that would be. But what really gave me a chill was the thought that it would also be just like him to manufacture whatever evidence he needed. After all, as I'd just recently learned, he'd done exactly that to get Falconetti once upon a time.

I hated leaving Kashi in the state she was in, but she managed to tell me that some friends were on the way, and with Magnotta on my ass I felt the need to move, and move quickly. I had no idea what Stephanie Jordan had intended to show me, and the only chance I had to find out what it might have been

was to see if anything unusual had been found with her body. For that, the only place I could think to look was the morgue at the Meta-Cog. If Magnotta had the new coroner, Eppels, in his pocket, then he'd feel safe enough bringing bodies there. But maybe I could get some leverage on Eppels. He'd seemed gullible enough.

Or maybe I was the gullible one. Had this been a setup? Had being stuck in traffic saved me? Or did the Ripper want it to happen exactly as it did, making it look as if I were involved with Stephanie Jordan's death? Was this a warning that I was getting too close?

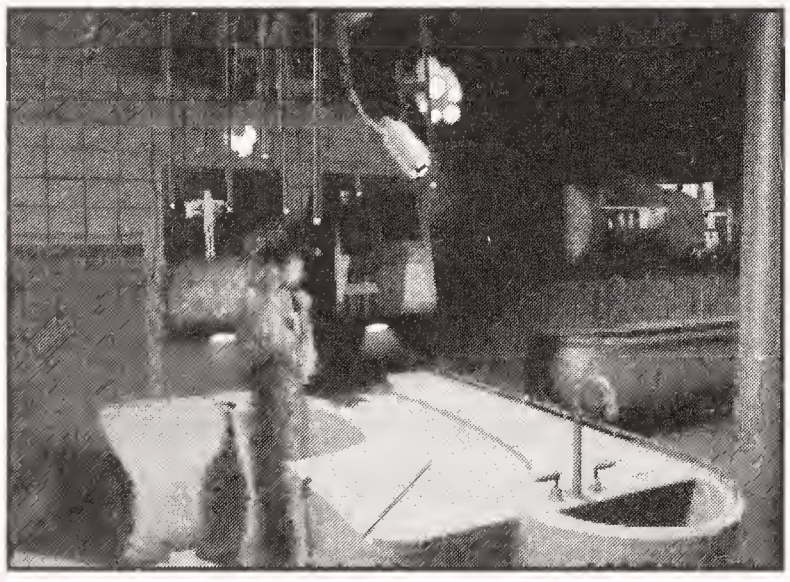
I had no choice but to keep moving, based on the theory that it's hard to hit a moving target. But Jesus, I hate to rely on theories.

Chapter 24

CLOSE BUT NO CIGAR

SKITTISH Bob Eppels performed true to form. He came on official and mannered, and soon collapsed into begging and near-hysterics, accidentally spilling his guts and giving me more than I'd hoped for. It went like this:

I walked in and saw his back go ramrod straight, like a good civil servant forced to work with an ignorant taxpayer. I demanded to know where Stephanie Jordan's body was, and he put his nose in the air and said, "I don't believe I know that name."



"The Ripper's latest victim," I informed him. "They'd bring her body here, wouldn't they?"

"Of course," he sniffed. "I'm sure there's information pertaining to her on that computer, but it hasn't worked since I arrived. I think your friend—" he gave the word a certain snooty twist "—Farley tampered with it before he left."

I looked over at it and saw he'd removed the access panel. Some of the circuits looked like they'd burned out.

"I called for a technician," he explained, "but it's impossible to get anything done quickly in this place."

I lied immediately. "I can fix it," I told him. "I'm excellent with this sort of thing." I glanced back at it, gave it a reassuring nod. "But it's gonna cost you."

"If you can get it running I'll see what I can find out," he agreed

after some thought. "But that's the extent of my involvement. I can't afford to lose this job."

"Deal," I told him.

I stepped up to the computer and tried to look like a man who knew what he was doing. As far as I could make out, some of the circuits had indeed burned out, others had become disconnected. The trick seemed to be to reconnect the circuits so a current could pass from one end of the circuit card to the other. The thing was, I had no idea what chip went where.

I wiped my hands together like a man about to dive under the hood of a car. I smiled. I said, "Well then." I rubbed my chin thoughtfully. I said, "I'll be right back," and I left.

I went straight to Soap Beatty's smoke shop.

The place looked closed when I got there. It was dark, except for a pale green frame of light bordering the door to the back room. I knocked on the glass and after a minute, the frame of light expanded to a thin rectangle; then I saw the head, levitating through the cluttered aisles to loom up quizzically right in front of me. Soap's face was crystal clear and close for a moment, then the glass fogged between us. It was as if he were disappearing, vaporizing in a cloudy haze, and just before he vanished entirely I saw him smile and mouth the word, "Quinlan."

A moment later, the front door swung open, the little overhead bell tinkling as if Tinkerbell were signaling the opening of a magic portal. I stepped inside and saw Soap, sitting there and looking fuzzy, as if still enveloped by the mysterious haze.

"Smoke," I said.

"That's Soap," he said.

"No," I said, waving a hand at the fat stogie clamped in his teeth. "I was trying to figure out how you had acquired your own personal cloud for a minute."

"Oh," he said. Then he shrugged. "It's a smoke shop, man."

"Right."

"You just caught me," he said, wheeling back to his normal position behind the counter. "I was just about to plop my fanny into the old decking chair."

The inappropriate question slipped from my lips before I had a chance to censor myself; a reporter's curse. "How do you get yourself into a decking chair?"

"I got some pulleys and ropes rigged up to a harness," he explained.

"Kind of like Soap on a rope, huh?" I offered.

"Catherine said you were a riot," he replied dryly.

"She did?" I felt a momentary pang at this.

"Yeah, that's just what she said. 'Quinlan, he's a goddamned riot.' "

"You're pretty funny yourself," I parlayed. "You ever consider being a stand-up comedian?"

His smirk darkened, then lightened, as if in spite of himself; he actually looked half-impressed.

I decided to cut to the chase before he told me something I didn't want to know. "I'm here to consult your vast knowledge of cyber-history," I told him. "Do you know anything about a group of gamers known as the Web Runners?"

"Whoa, that's way before my time," he said.

I pointed out that the group was still around.

"Yeah, but I have a feeling you want to know about the old days," he surmised.

"You're a mind reader."

"I told you, I got a lot of different skills."

"That's why I'm here."

"The guy you need to talk to about that is a fellow named Gambit Nelson," he told me.

"I know him," I said, remembering how Nelson had helped me track down Falconetti the first time.

"Well then what the hell you bothering me for? He's the one to talk to. He's an old-time gamer, been around for years and years. Any more questions?"

I asked him about the circuit card. He pointed out a high-tech manual on his magazine rack.

"Anything else?" he asked.

"Yeah. Where are the free cigars?"

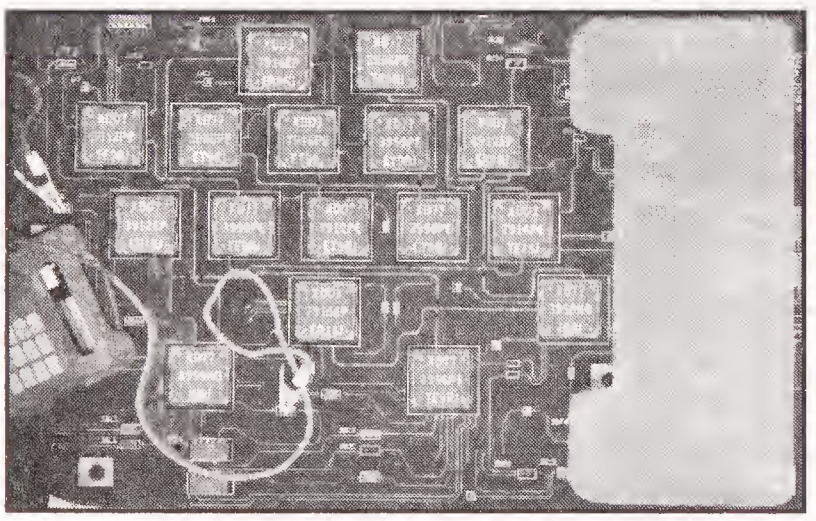
"They're in my competitor's shop down the street, Joe Blows."

I tucked the circuitry manual under my arm and headed for the door. I stopped beneath the tinkling bell and looked back at the rangy man in his urban commando wheelchair. "Thanks for the magazine," I told him.

"What?" he said, as it dawned on him that I hadn't paid for it. "Wait just a minute, you mother—"

I let the door swing closed behind me, Tinkerbell finishing the sentence for him.

Back at the morgue, it didn't take me long to get the circuit card fixed, although I think the way I fixed it—by flipping back and forth from the manual to the card—undercut my image as a techno-mechanic in Bob Eppels' eyes.



He was a man of his word, however, and when I got the thing up and running again, he punched Jordan's name into the computer and scrutinized the results.

"Strange," he muttered. "This says Jordan's body is in the animal storage

room. That doesn't make any sense. They just store monkeys down there for use in experiments."

In the manner of geeks everywhere, he seemed really disturbed by this bit of nonstandard practice. His face screwed up and he read the results again as if this just couldn't be.

"Where is this storage area?" I queried nonchalantly.

"Through that door at the back of the room over there," he began distractedly; then he caught himself. "Oh no you don't. Mr. Quinlan, please leave before you get me fired."

I had him and I knew it. "Through the back door of the morgue, you say?" I asked.

He was nearly begging me by this time, his entire career—his life, really—flashing before his eyes.

"Please, Mr. Quinlan, please! Just leave me alone."

I was already headed for the door. The back door.

"As far as I'm concerned I never saw you!" he called after me. Like a child, he'd decided if he hadn't seen it, it hadn't happened. This was fine by me. I didn't need anybody else knowing I was there.

But the smug satisfaction I felt at having outwitted a half-wit didn't last long. I found the animal storage area in the basement, all right, but there were only animals in it. Monkeys. Crates stacked upon crates of monkeys. I hate monkeys.

I stood in the midst of the stench and muttered a few choice epithets concerning Eppels, the administration of the Meta-Cog, and monkeys. I wondered what in the

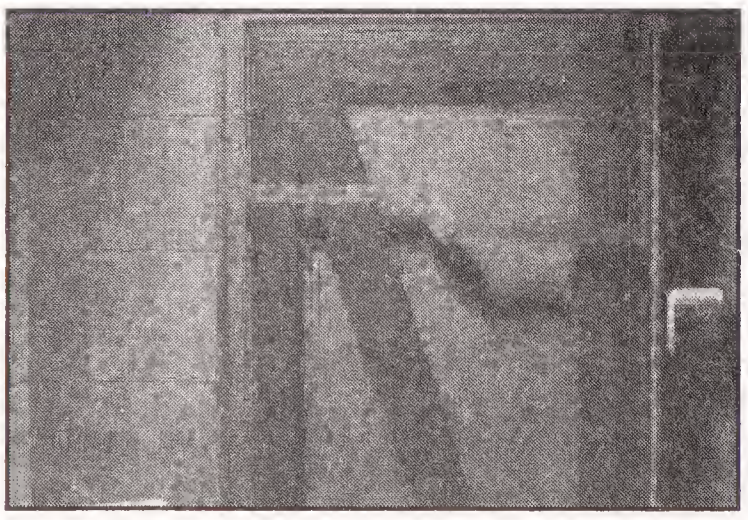
world they were doing to these creatures. Maybe they were teaching them sign language or something, so they could say, "Doctor, it hurts when you put that electrode on my privates." Then I spotted another door, partially concealed toward the back of the room. I made my way toward it, only to find it had a voice lock on it.

This was getting frustrating, but interesting. What in the world could they be hiding behind a locked door in the back of a monkey room in the basement? Was Jordan's body in there? I figured they must have found something really remarkable on her to go to such trouble.

But then I realized they must have something else going on in there. They wouldn't have had time to install a voice lock in the short time since Jordan had been murdered. Whatever else was in there for a while. It was something ongoing.

I started having mad visions of Clare Burton behind that door, working in a seedy basement lab with monkeys and murder victims hooked up to electrodes like she was Dr. Frankenstein. Lord knows, the concept resonated with the rest of the gruesome case.

I barked at the voice lock to open up, which of course was a useless enterprise. And I knew I'd never get Burton to open it for me with her dulcet tones. There had to be another way to open it.



There was only one person I could think of who knew anything about such high-tech security systems. And I just happened to know that, even at this late hour, he was still up and at 'em.

It occurred to me that I could really use a cigar, too. Anything that would get the smell of monkeys out of my nostrils.

Chapter 25

KILLER WORKOUT

I had the feeling Soap was getting a little tired of my after-hours visits.

"Tell me, what the hell do you do during the daylight?" he asked. "Sleep in coffins?"

"If you don't help me out, I'd say that's a distinct possibility," I told him.

He seemed nonplussed.

I decided to take a persuasive tack. "I've got a small problem, and I knew it would take a genius like you to—"

"What is it this time?" he said, shaking his head.

"Voice locks," I said.

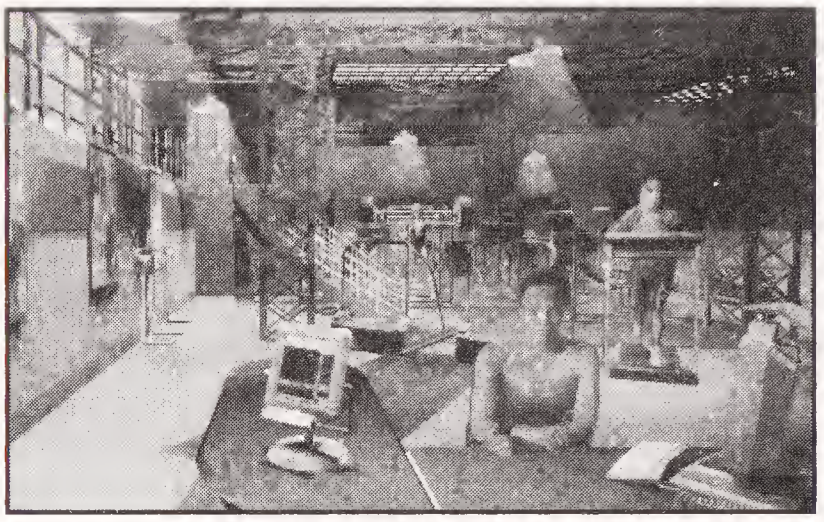
He snorted. "Shoot, Quinlan, everybody knows about them—they're all the same. You want to crack a voice lock, all you got to do is get a sound sample of the owner's voice saying 'This is me, open up,' or something like that."

Seemed simple enough, if you overlooked the fact that I'd have to get Burton to repeat after me, into the microphone, please, and don't ask why. Something Soap wouldn't be able to help me with, I knew. He still wouldn't give me a cigar, either.

I was disappointed about that. I'd been hoping to have a big old stogie in my face when I walked into the gym to talk to Burton, which is where I was headed next. As far as the good

doctor was concerned, I was feeling obnoxious. She'd been holding out on me, and I wanted to know why.

As it turned out, I was wishing I had a Havana going the minute I walked into the place, because it might have warded off the attendant, who was just a bit too healthy and chipper for a guy who'd been up for days, hadn't eaten, and felt like crap.



"You here to join up?" she asked, perky as could be. "Not a moment too soon, from the look of you."

In mid-insult, I spotted Burton across the room. She was going to town on a treadmill, engrossed in whatever virtual course she'd programmed into the thing.

"What do you know about that woman over there?" I asked the attendant.

She made one of those faces the young made when feigning admiration for old-timers who try.

"Dr. Burton?" she chirped. "She's been running ten miles every other day for years. She usually runs the Victorian London course. Real serious. No chitchat."

Then I had a moment of journalistic inspiration.

"You keep records of your members?" I asked.

"Well, that terminal over there—" she indicated a computer nearby "—has some information, if you're interested." Then she smiled strangely. "You interested?" she asked.

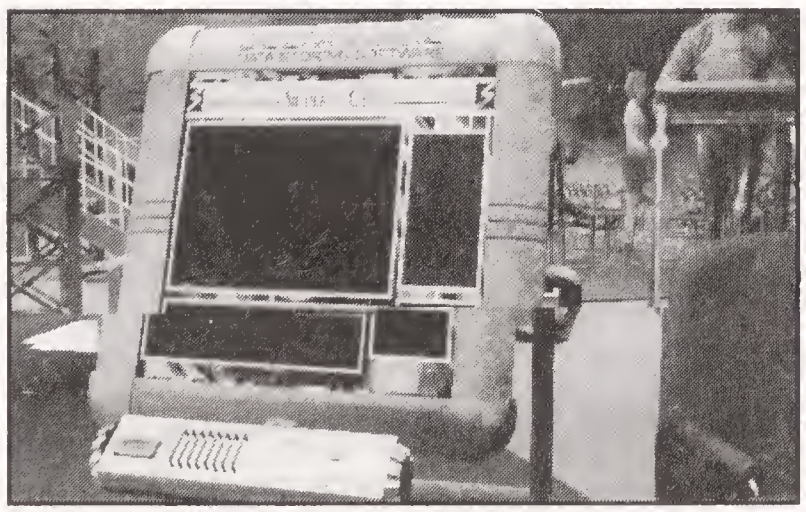
It took me a moment to realize she was coming on to me. I stared at her slightly dumbfounded, taking in her muscular build. I was

thinking this woman would kill me.

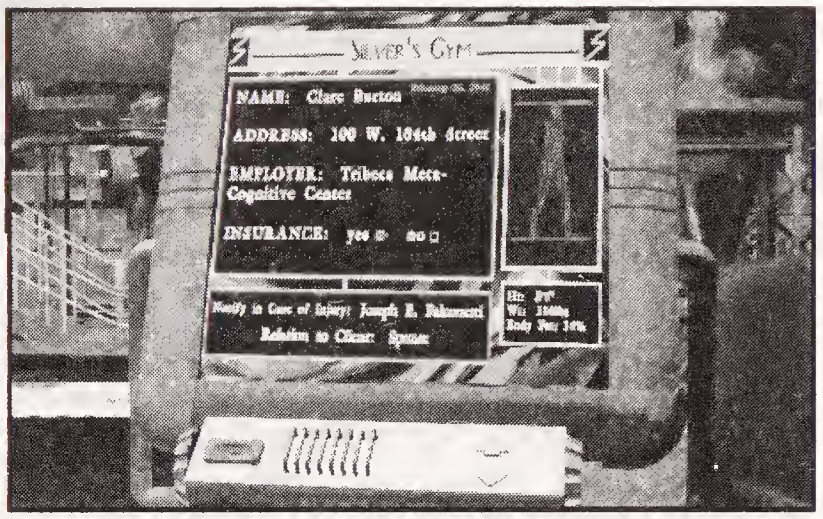
I gave her the old "Maybe." It seemed to satisfy her. I moved off to check out the computer records before Burton spotted me. I figured it wouldn't look too good if the woman who was treating my comatose girlfriend saw me shmoozing with a gym bunny. Come to think of it, it probably wouldn't look very good if she saw me checking out her records in the computer, either. This would have to be fast.

Luckily, the computer was easy to access. All I had to do was scroll down to the "b's" and there she was. Besides learning her home address, I found out that she weighed 110 pounds, had sixteen percent body fat, and the person to notify in case of emergency was her "spouse," one Joseph Falconetti.

It surprised me again. It was still hard to believe that the urbane Dr. Burton had been married to that blade fetishist. Then I did a double take—it seemed they were *still* married—unless Burton had neglected to update her file, they'd never divorced. There must be a reason for that, I thought, although maybe the reason was that it allowed them to keep fighting. I know some marriages are like that. Marriage is not something I understand.



Anyway, I closed up the file quickly before Burton could see me at the computer, double-checked to make sure I had my tape recorder in



my pocket, and started to make my way over to her. I was still unsure how I would get her to say what I needed, which was her name and the phrase, "open up." I'd just have to come up with it somehow.

I realized as I drew closer that it had been a couple of hours, at least, since I'd seen her at the Meta-Cog. She'd been working out for hours, and she looked like she had a couple more in her—the closer I got, the more I could see she was concentrating too hard to notice anything. She looked the way I imagined she looked during brain surgery—so intense she looked almost angry. It resembled her expression when answering a certain reporter's questions.

This time, though, she surprised me—when I finally got to her, she looked semi-friendly, and somewhere between nervous and vulnerable. It made me notice again how attractive she was. Of course, maybe everyone feels a little vulnerable in spandex. But not everyone looks that good in it.

"Do you run, Quinlan?" she asked.

"Only for a story," I told her.

"You're making me nervous standing there," she said.

I had to remember that I was supposed to be aggressive here. Also that I had a tape recorder in my pocket.

"So why don't you just tell me the truth about why you're obstructing Catherine's treatment?" I asked.

She heaved a sigh. "I'm not," she said. "Look, I know what I'm doing. Joey may be a genius, but he's also crazy. If your girlfriend dies because of some untested method of his, I'm the one who'll get the blame."

It sounded reasonable enough, but there were still plenty of reasons to suspect her—gray areas, things she wasn't telling me, things she'd kept from me.

Chapter 25

"So, was that why you fired Farley?" I asked. "Protecting your ass?"

Her look seemed to be one of genuine surprise.

"What?" she said. "Farley was fired?"

"You didn't know?"

"No! I … I liked Farley. He was a good pathologist."

I didn't buy it. She practically ran the place. She had to have known.

"Don't you find it mildly interesting that they'd fire such a good pathologist in the middle of the most intensive murder investigation the city's ever seen?"

Her eyes shifted for a moment, as if she was trying to make sense of this, determine what it meant to her. Maybe she really hadn't known.

"It doesn't make things any easier," she finally muttered.

Still, she'd shown a moment of uncertainty. It was time to dive in.

"So you were a Web Runner," I said. Not a question. A statement of fact. I wanted her to think that maybe I already knew everything she was keeping from me. Then, maybe she'd spill something I didn't know, accidental-like.

"Fifteen years ago," she said perfunctorily. "When I was a kid. It was exciting. I learned more about cyberspace than I did in school. But the Web Runners were all about playing games, and—" she shrugged "—I grew up."

She said it like it was nothing, a time of no consequence. I suspected otherwise.

"Was it a game when you married Falconetti?" I asked sarcastically. "I mean, you know, despite how well you two seem to get along, somehow I can't picture you together."

Still, she seemed unfazed. She actually smirked. "Took you long enough, Quinlan," she said, as if this were a game to her, too—a game she was playing with me. "Biggest mistake of my life."

I was starting to feel grumpy. I thought I'd tagged her with a few good ones, but she wasn't going down. A couple of good questions and God knows how many miles on the treadmill, and the woman hadn't even broken a sweat. "And how long did it take you to figure that out?" I groused.

"About five minutes," she said. "Six months for the lawyers. Fifteen years to forget."

The Web Runners line wasn't working. I switched to the other man she seemed to have a strange relationship with.

"What about you and Magnotta?" I tried.

"He brings me patients," she said. "That's our relationship."

I snorted. "I hear there's more to it than that," I told her.

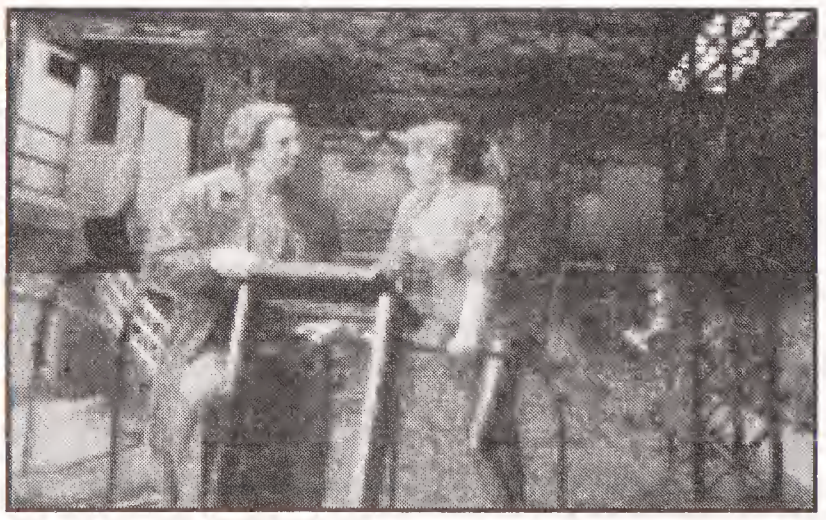
She shrugged again. "He's a man with a grudge."

I'd never really interviewed a surgeon before; I should have told myself Burton would be cool under pressure.

"Against whom?" I pressed her.

"Who do you think?"

I pointed out that this grudge was no simple thing, that it had something to do with what was going on now, that it was rooted in the past she'd kept from me—I told her I knew that she and Falconetti had been friends with Magnotta.



"Friends is pushing it," she said.

I'd had enough of her coyness. "Look," I said, "I know you were all members of this Web Runners thing. What are the three of you hiding?"

"What makes you think we're hiding anything?"

Chapter 25

"Three people involved in a murder case all just happened to hang out together fifteen years ago?"

"Stranger things have happened."

Her answers were still glib, but I could sense a shield had gone up. Maybe I was getting through. I decided it was time to remind her once again that maybe I was on to some of her secrets, give her one more chance to come clean. I didn't want to let up on the Falconetti-Magnotta connection.

"I know about Magnotta breaking up your wedding," I told her.

"Hard to believe, isn't it? Charming guy like him."

"Hard to believe he still has a heart. But I think it still beats for you."

She blinked at this; I realized I might have penetrated the shield.

"When I married Joey," she began, tentatively, "I learned how crazy Vince was. He became obsessed with me—*and* Joey. That obsession nearly ruined our lives. Now … it might kill us."

She lapsed into thoughtfulness. I pounced.

"Did you hear the Ripper has killed again?"

She gave me a hesitant look.

"Stephanie Jordan," I said, and with this, Burton's shield collapsed altogether.

"Stephanie …" she muttered, as if deflating. "Jesus … ."

I could see she was genuinely unaware. Also, I could see a real element of fear rimming her eyes. If I'd been on the make, I would have gotten all squishy and sympathetic here. I wasn't on the make, though. And here, it suddenly occurred to me, was my opportunity to really get something out of her—in more ways than one.

I whipped out my tape recorder.

"Come on, Dr. Burton, you're going to have to open up—"

She went rigid, her massive self-control returning. "Don't Dr. Burton me!" she snapped. "I'm not going to open up to you. This is ridiculous."

The shield was back up, more firmly than ever. I was sunk, insofar as getting any more information out of her. But I was practically giddy as I replayed her quote in my mind—I'd gotten her to say her name and open up in one sentence. I scrambled mentally through the rest of what she'd said and realized she'd also said, "this is." I had what I needed—if I could edit the tape, I could piece together Burton herself saying, "This is Dr. Burton. Open up." It just might work.

Meanwhile, she'd thrown herself back into her workout. There was no doubt in my mind that I'd rattled her. It looked like she was determined to work it off. Maybe she'd be at that gym for hours more. If I worked fast, I might be able to edit the tape and get into her secret facility in the Meta-Cog basement while she pounded the pavement of Victorian London. A big maybe, but at least I knew where to get an audio editor. And there was no sense plugging Burton any further. She'd clearly switched on her own audio editor.

I nonchalantly thanked her for her time and told her I'd see her again. She smirked, but it wasn't the chiseled, sharp-edged expression it had been earlier. I strolled out of there like I was in total control, able to bust her whenever I wanted. Then, as soon as I got out of sight, I beat it for the newsroom.

Chapter 26

TOO MUCH MONKEY BUSINESS

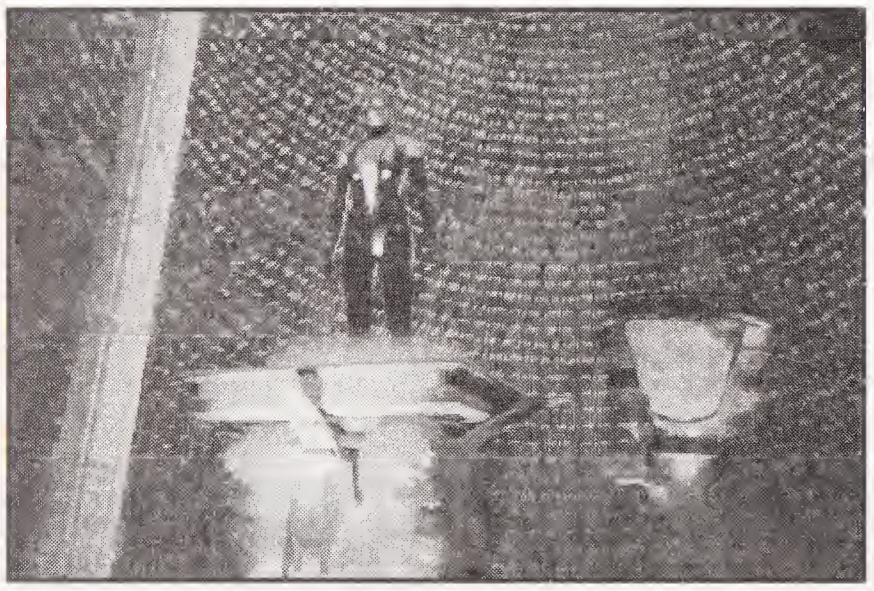
As soon as I got to the newsroom, I stopped off at Ben's office to run a few background questions by him. After all, Ben had been around forever. He'd know if any of these characters had ever been in the news before. I didn't have time to check the newspaper's morgue. I'd been spending too much time in morgues as it was.

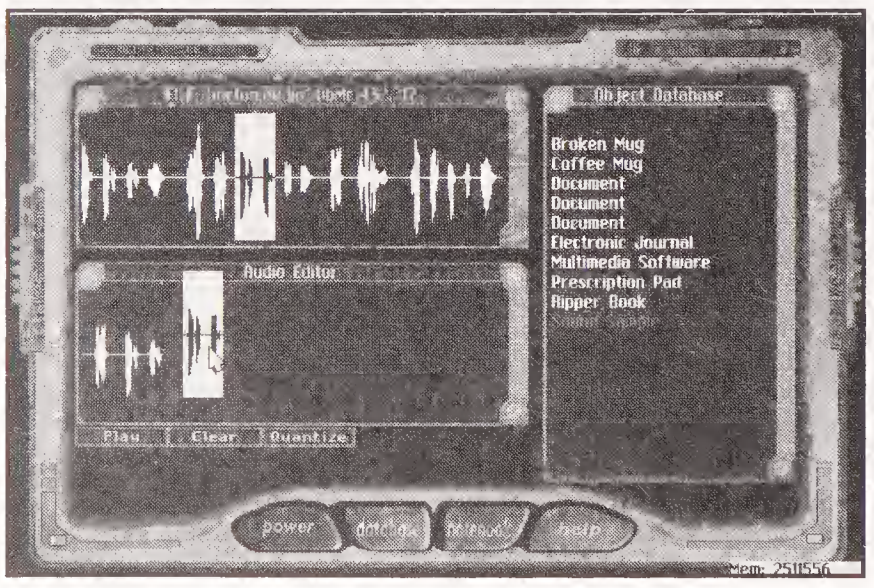
It turned out to be a typical Ben Dodds exchange: brief, terse, unshaded, and to the point—like, say, a right hook to the point of your chin.

"Don't you two ever share sources?" he grumbled in irritation when I asked him about Gambit Nelson. Seems Catherine had already queried him on Gambit. A week ago.

I asked him about the Wofford murder and he told me to stick to the Ripper story. I asked him if he knew anything about Falconetti and he thought he knew the name, but he couldn't come up with anything. Then he stared at me, as if to say, "Why aren't you writing?"

I retreated to my desk and decked into cyberspace. I wasted no time in getting to the New York Public Library, where I found an audio-video editor on the shelf there. Eagerly, I took it to the librarian, who was as no-nonsense as ever. This meant that she first had to check to make sure she had my name on record—clearly, her life was so interesting and full she had no space in her memory banks for her own involvement in something as pedestrian as a murder investigation in the real world. She found my name, though, then primly explained that I could only sign out the editor for a month. I thought about telling her I'd be lucky to be alive in a month, but this woman was one of those classic librarian types who seemed to think reading was a humorless business. She downloaded the editor's files on my decking unit's memory for me, and I politely thanked her, then booted back to my desk immediately.





I downloaded the tape I'd made of Burton back at the gym onto the editor and began to work. Once I'd figured out how to clip the right words from her

quote, it was easy to piece together the phrase I needed and concoct what I hoped would be the open sesame—"This is Dr. Burton. Open up."

I jammed the tape back into the recorder for later playback and took off for the Meta-Cog.

It seemed like days since I'd been there, whereas in reality I think it had only been an hour or so. I think. Viv Santiago was still working the desk; she'd been there on my last visit, too, plugging away answering phones at her desk, which meant that her eight-hour shift hadn't ended yet. In less than eight hours I'd been there three or four times. Time was doing funny things lately. I stopped by the desk to orient myself.

Viv abruptly told somebody on the phone to please hold when she saw me standing there.

"Hey, Jake, saw your story on the latest murder." I nodded and tried to look pleased; I couldn't remember writing it, I was in such a daze. "Listen," she went on, suddenly looking so deeply contrite about something that I was worried about her for a moment. "You know I was just kidding before when I made that crack about your girlfriend croaking, right? I mean, God, it must be awful—"

"No harm, no foul," I told her.

"And I'll tell you something else," she went on. "Magnotta's been looking for you. I figured you should know. I mean, he's not the kind of guy I'd want looking for me."

A shiver wracked her shoulders; I held back from asking her what kind of guy she would want looking for her. I had a feeling her answer would only make me uncomfortable.

"Magnotta here now?" I inquired.

"Just left," she replied. "The coast is clear."

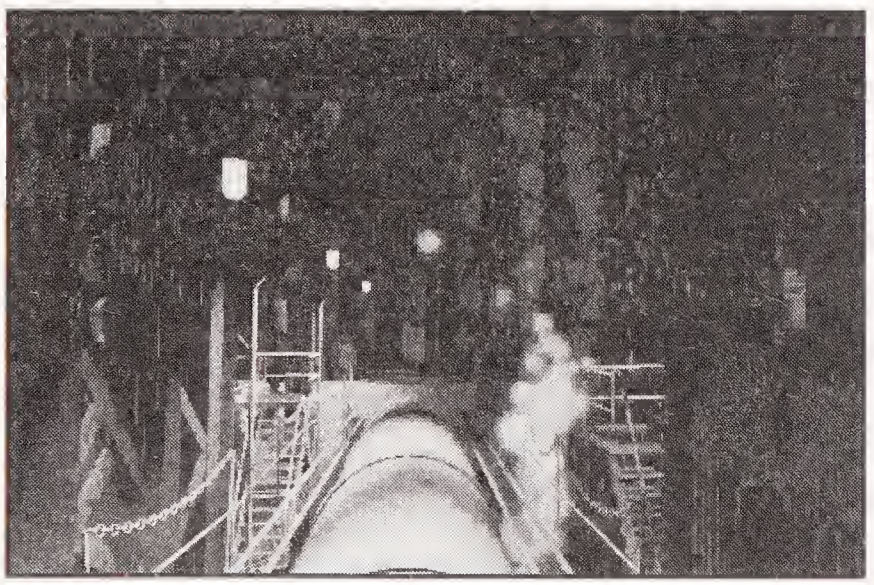
"Thanks, Viv. I appreciate it."

"Not enough you don't," she said with one of her famous winks. She was back to her old self. "But you're welcome just the same."

The original geek, Bob Eppels, was busy when I got to the morgue, and I managed to slip by him through the back door without his noticing. I figured I was doing him a favor; he'd have only been a nervous wreck if he knew what I was up to.

I got to the monkey storage area, regretting as soon as I opened the door that I'd been too cheap to buy a cigar from Soap earlier. I hustled to the voice-locked door and prayed the jury-rigged tape would open it, and not just because I wanted to see what was on the other side. I was hoping it wasn't more monkeys.

The audio file on the door worked like a charm; I would have felt a smug sense of techno-accomplishment if I hadn't been gagging at the time. The door slid open, and I stepped in quickly and closed it behind me.

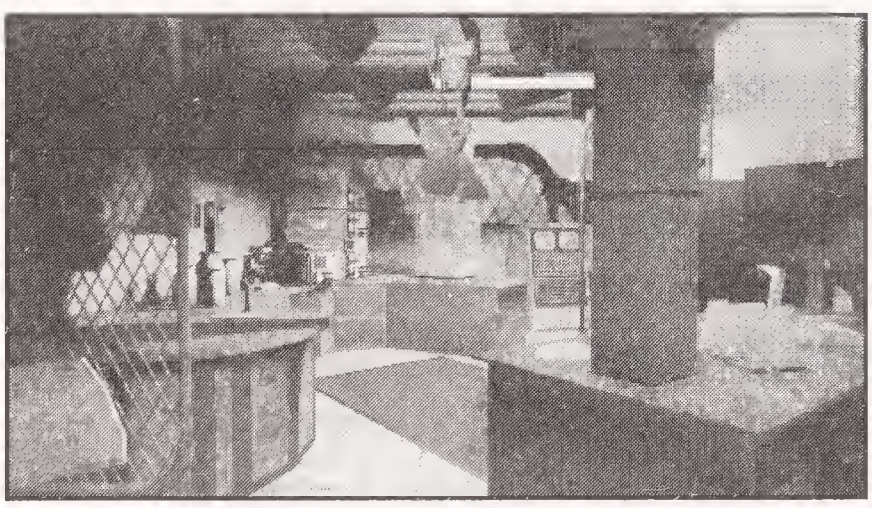


It was dark in there and the air was cool; for a moment, I thought I was outside, except that the air seemed lifeless, and there were no stars overhead. It took a few moments for my eyes to adjust, but once they did I realized I was in a large and airy concrete shaft ... that had rails in it. I was in an old subway tunnel. They must

have sealed it off when they built the new pneumatic system twenty years before, then built the Meta-Cog on top of it. I moved ahead slowly as rats scattered at my feet.

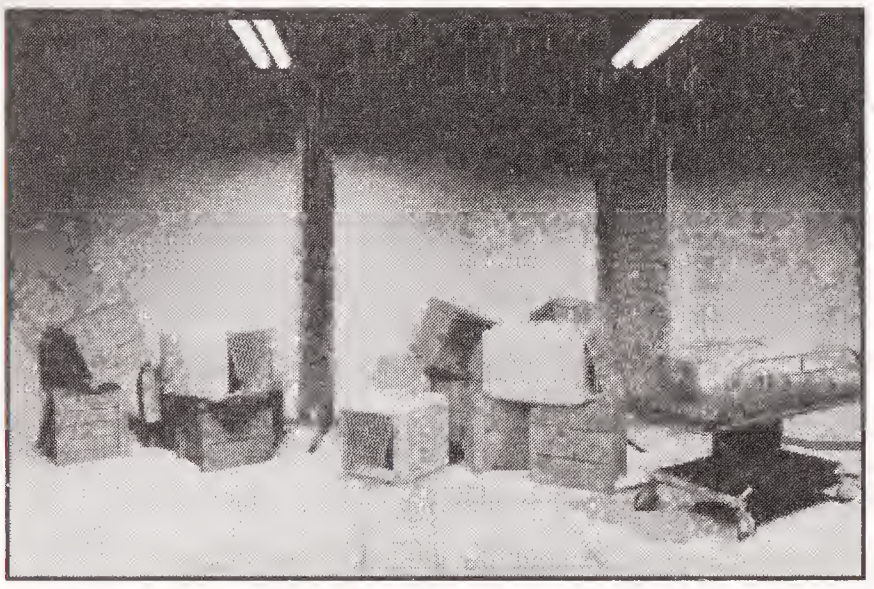
At the end of the tunnel was an abandoned train car that looked ancient. I could see through the windows that it wasn't empty, however, and the power wires draped from above told me it wasn't abandoned, either. I climbed inside carefully, and found that all the original seating had been removed, and replaced with boxes and empty animal cages and stray debris left over from the renovation … and also a shrouded body on a gurney. I walked over to it hesitantly, debating whether I had the nerve to peel back the sheet. I decided to read the tag hanging from the gurney instead.

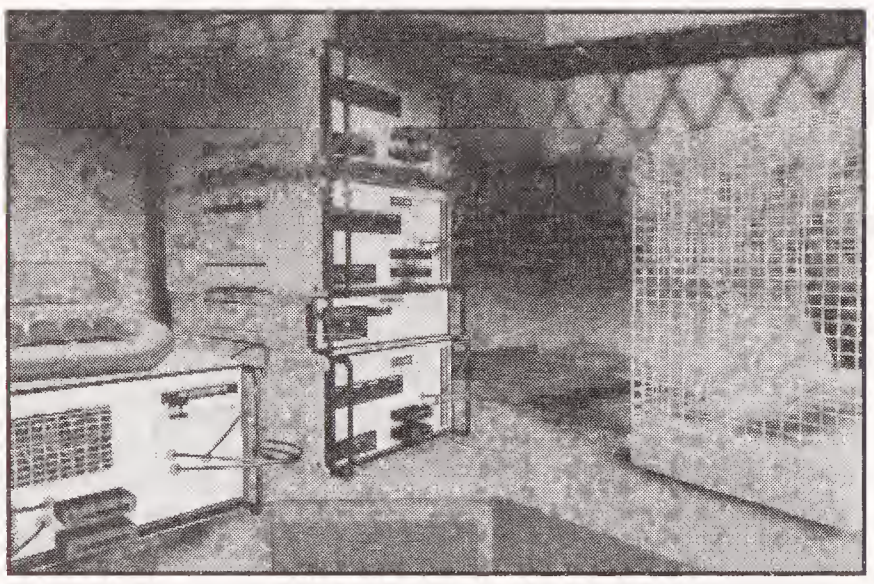
It was Stephanie Jordan. I felt a burst of useless anger—at myself, for not, somehow, having gotten to her in time; and toward the person who had left her where she was now—Clare Burton. So she'd known about Jordan's murder when I'd interviewed her at the gym. The doctor was a much better actress than I'd been giving her credit for. She'd certainly taken the dispassionate scientist thing too far, as far as I was concerned.



But, of course, how far was exactly what I was there to find out. The car had been divided into two rooms. I moved on into the next one.

Although much cleaner and chock-full of high-tech computers and monitors and testing equipment, the other half of the train car was no less spooky or dramatic. It would have taken a real expert to figure out what was going on in that subterranean lab. Then a faint, familiar aroma came to me across the antiseptic air of that room. I sniffed, turned, and spotted its





source—there was a monkey in there with me.

This one was in bad shape, however. He was in a cage and wired to a bunch of ominous-looking machinery. Obviously, the sorry creature was undergoing a lot of torturous experimentation. He looked positively wretched and when he batted his big eyes at me. Weakly, I backed away.

It took everything I had in me not to vamoose out of there, but I fought the urge by reminding myself I was looking for evidence. Just the fact that Stephanie Jordan's body was there wasn't enough. Or I should say, it wasn't enough for the police. For me, it was enough. But it doesn't work that way.

The place gave me the creeps though, and I had the feeling if Burton found me there I might end up on a slab all wired up like Jordan. I started to shift around the room as quickly yet methodically as I could.

The problem was I didn't know what I was looking for, nor what I was looking at. It was all high-tech spaceship stuff. I was ready to give up when I spotted something I recognized: a video-med journal, just like the one I'd snuck a look at back in the ICU. I went to it quickly and hit the playback button.

It summoned up an image of what must have been Burton's most recent session there. She was working with the monkey, and as I watched I understood why he was in such miserable shape. Burton

would position an electrode, then adjust some slider switches on a nearby panel; the monkey would writhe in agony. Then she repeated the process, readjusting the dials. The monkey screamed in pain.

As sinister as it all appeared, it was also fascinating—especially when, after several attempts, Burton adjusted the switches, then bent over the chimp to ask him a question … and he answered.

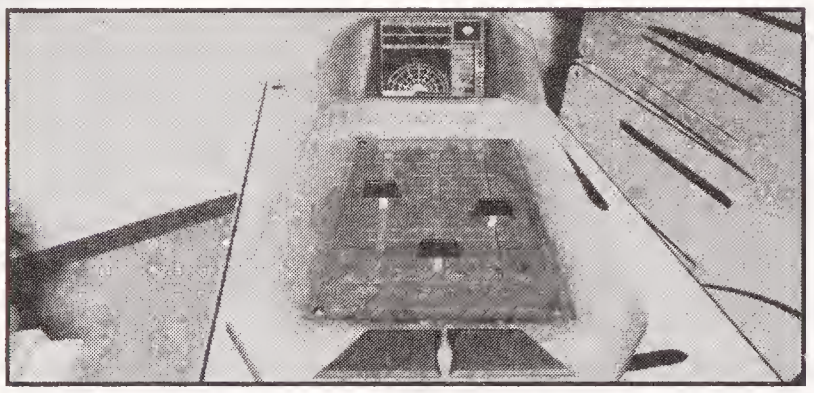
Stunned, I leaned closer and saw that I hadn't imagined it—most of the electrodes Burton had attached to the animal were wired to his head, and it slowly dawned on me that she was somehow synthesizing the creature's thoughts through a computer and into language. The voice was electronic, definitely coming from the computer, but also—magically and unmistakably—the monkey's.

"Hunger … fear," he said, his voice a thin, screeching whine. "Burning … go … go … ."

After the initial repulsion, I recognized that what I was viewing was probably legitimate science. Like a lot of people, I understand that science simply can't avoid animal testing and experimentation. I just don't want to see it, is all. But as for what Burton was doing, I had to admit it was absolutely remarkable. I mean, she'd made a monkey talk, for Christ's sake. What I wanted to know was why she needed to hide it all in an abandoned subway car.

I watched her repeat the process one more time—saw where she positioned the controls, memorized it—then went over to the monkey myself. I looked at him, felt sorry for him. He winced when I came closer.

"I'm sorry," I told him. I had no choice. Maybe he could tell me



what was going on. I had to try.

But I must have positioned the sliders incorrectly; the monkey shrieked in pain. I quickly reset the dials, vowing that if it didn't work this time I'd quit. I didn't want to hear that sound again. I looked closely at the slider switches, double-checking that they appeared to be at the same setting as the one I'd memorized from the video-med journal: 9, 1, 5. That looked right. I set them, then shut my eyes and listened.

I heard the snap of transistors before the voice whirred on, shuffling through one independent sound file after another, one at a time.

"Killing," the monkey's computer-generated voice began, and a chill snaked up my spine. "Others. Like. Me. Head. Machine. She. Can. Kill. Without. Touching. Cyberspace. Brain. Dead."

He looked at me, his lids closing slowly. I switched off the machine and backed away slowly. Then I left. For a moment, I'd actually considered rescuing that monkey. But for all I knew, Burton's machines were keeping him alive. He looked dead already.

Once I got out of that hellish lair I was able to think about what had happened. I didn't have much trouble interpreting what the monkey had to say: Apparently, Burton was doing something to these monkeys in cyberspace and it was killing some of them. I couldn't figure how this might be connected to the Ripper, but it seemed to bespeak a predilection for torture, for one thing. For another, it was clear that, as with Falconetti and Magnotta, Clare Burton had some dark, gruesome secrets of her own.

Chapter 27

CHEAP PUZZLE, MURDEROUS DILEMMA

CLARE Burton had always been my most curious suspect. It was hard to figure her getting involved with thugs like Magnotta and Falconetti. She was a cold fish, but she didn't have their murderous temperament, which had also made her my weakest suspect.

But that was all changed now. She'd hidden the body of a Ripper victim, a victim she'd pretended not to know was even dead. This was the most damning evidence I'd found so far. It demanded an explanation. I was headed back to the gym before I had time to think about the fact that I was about to raise hell with someone who was, potentially, the devil.

She was still on the treadmill. She grimaced when she saw me coming, and answered curtly when I asked her if she ever got off the treadmill.

"Surgeons have to be in absolutely outstanding shape," she told me. "It takes a certain amount of stamina to stand over an exposed brain for hours in a hot operating room."

"Or in a dank and dirty subway car," I observed.

It seemed to have no effect on her—she seemed neither surprised nor concerned that I knew about her secret lab and its contents. She seemed to understand how I read the implications, however.

"Just because it's hidden doesn't mean it's illegal, Quinlan," she told me without even breaking her vigorous stride. "I'm doing some very important work in there, and I'm not talking to you or anyone else about it."

"Hiding Stephanie Jordan's body in a subway tunnel doesn't strike me as legitimate," I snapped. "Nor does lying to me about it."

Once again, the name Stephanie Jordan seemed to elicit a profound reaction from her. I just couldn't tell what it was—she put her head down and kept running. "No comment," she muttered.

"Secret labs, mutilated animals, the corpse of a Ripper victim ... I feel a story coming on," I told her. I could see her lips tightening. I wanted her to feel the burn. "And you know, I've never attributed a quote to a monkey before."

At this, Burton actually stopped the treadmill and drew herself up ramrod straight. "Look Quinlan, I'd like to help, and I know what it looks like. But I'm conducting sensitive research, and scientists just don't release their findings until they're sure of them."

"I'm not trying to jockey you out of grant money here, doctor!" I exploded. "I'm trying to catch a killer!"

Burton leveled a gaze at me that I just couldn't read, and I remembered what a poker face I was dealing with.

"I'm trying to catch a killer," I repeated steadily.

Her gaze was unwavering. "Maybe I am, too," she said.

She stared at me for a

moment more, then resumed her relentless stride on the treadmill. She knew I had no way of knowing any more about what, precisely, she was up to in that subway car. For now, I was stuck on a treadmill of my own, and she knew it.

I stalked out into the night, my head in an angry muddle, trying to figure out who was lying and what I was missing in the whole Web Runners scenario. Meanwhile, my feet pounded onward toward the newsroom, like a cow at dusk, coming back from pasture and into the barn. My brain smoked and churned, while my feet headed home, and my hands checked my WAC for messages … my appendages, in other words, were taking care of business by remote control.

So seeing the image on the monitor of my WAC was like emerging from a smog-filled tunnel; I'd been thinking too hard, while my reporter's reflexes had gone on doing what they always did, and it was a lesson in the value of steady discipline—another entry from Catherine's notebook had decoded itself. If I'd been thinking about what I was doing, I probably would have told my hands not to bother even checking the WAC. I probably would have told them, instead, to grab a shot of whiskey, or to find something to break, or to occupy themselves with throwing in the towel.

But there it was, and I scanned it in near desperation.

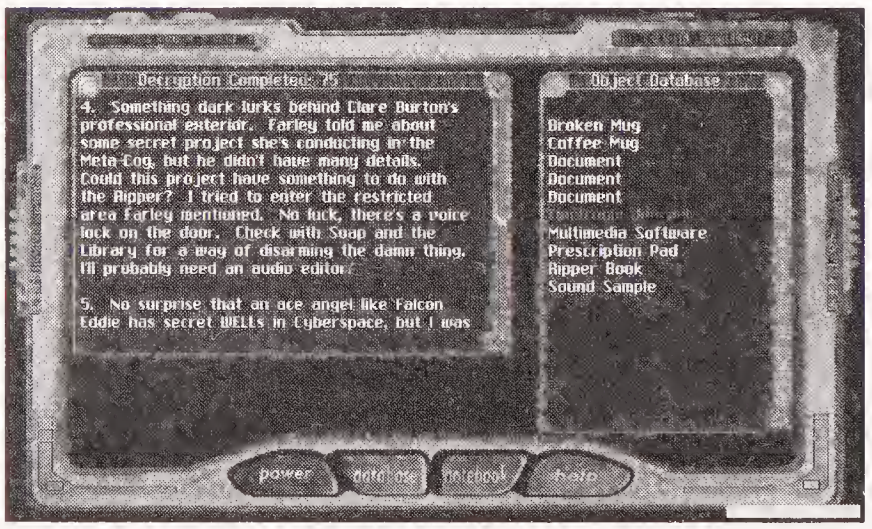
"No surprise that Falconetti has secret WELLs in cyberspace," it began, and I felt a tingle of anticipation prickling along the back of my neck, "but I was able to extract the address to one of them from Twig. The WELL address is 'Leather Apron.' Interesting things there. Doesn't look good for the Falcon."

This was a tremendous stroke of luck, and I owed it all to my unconscious girlfriend. I had to hand it to her—Catherine really was a good reporter. Of course, I didn't want to think about how, exactly, she may have pried that information out of the loyal Twig. But aside from that, I realized that getting more info about Falconetti was precisely what I needed just then. I'd gone as far

as I could investigating Burton at the moment, but ever since learning she'd been married to Falconetti I'd been toying with the idea that the two of them were in cahoots on something from long ago. God knows what kind of stuff Falconetti kept in his WELL, but I suspected him of being a real pack rat, and it seemed a safe bet that he'd have stuff from his days in the Web Runners, stuff relating to his marriage to Burton, even stuff about what he was doing—what he was really doing—now. He was a criminal on the run, and cyberspace would be the only place he could really hide evidence of his ongoing activities. No doubt about it—it was a potential treasure trove.

Then I realized something else—'Leather Apron' had been one of the original Jack the Ripper's nicknames, having to do with the leather apron worn by Victorian butchers. It was a hell of a name to use for yourself with that as a precedent. Unless, of course, you're something of a butcher yourself, I thought.

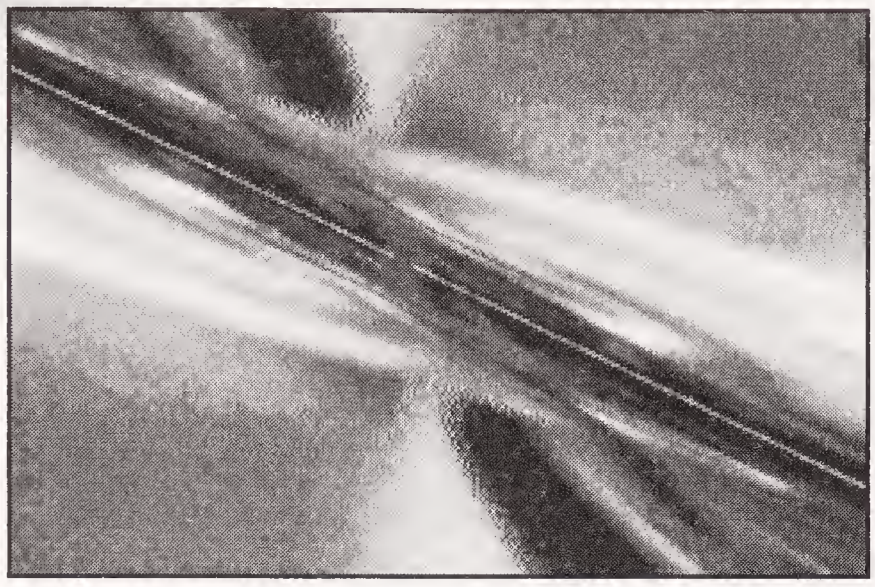
Meanwhile, Catherine's entry had continued to decode, and I read on in eager anticipation of still more good news. What I got was something less.



"Jake almost stumbled upon these notes yesterday," the entry ended. "How much longer can I keep my efforts secret from him?"

It was another lesson in reporting—don't count on things being what they appear to be. Why would Catherine want to hide these notes from me? Because she wanted to scoop her own boyfriend? Or because the notes signified something other than reporting? Either way, it brought me back to the realization that she'd been up to something that wasn't quite—well, Jake.

It tamped down my sudden enthusiasm, and I tried to tell



myself that, as far as Falconetti's WELL was concerned, I shouldn't count those chickens until they hatched, either.

I made tracks to the newsroom, where I went to my computer, and decked in.

Zooming through the initial swoop of entry, I tried to keep my senses on red alert. Any secret WELL of Falconetti's was bound to be protected by the fiercest, most cutting-edge ICE ever invented—it would probably be even worse than the biologic ICE we'd faced in Catherine's brain. I'd be lucky to get out of it alive, let alone hack through it.

So I was shocked when I got there, typed 'Leather Apron,' threw myself into a combat stance, and was confronted by … nothing. I looked around and saw one of those sliding tile puzzles like I'd hacked at the Web Runners' archive. Now I knew where they'd gotten the idea, but I'd expected more from the Falcon. I thought maybe it was a trick. A simple puzzle? It didn't make sense. I held back for a moment, looking around, but there was nothing more. No ICE, no monsters … what a rip-off.

But I realized my luck and, putting aside my disappointment that there wasn't a combat here to test my growing cyber-aggression, I focused on the puzzle. I shouldn't have been so quick to underestimate the Falcon—the slider was fiendishly devious, moving all the other pieces seemingly at random as soon as I flipped one

over. But it didn't take me long to figure out the pattern, and that the image I was assembling was a giant picture of Falconetti himself. Figured. The guy was a world-class egomaniac.

Once I'd entered his WELL, however, my disappointment fell away quickly, and my sense of excitement returned like a hot flash that wouldn't quit. The place was, indeed, a dark and spooky treasure trove.

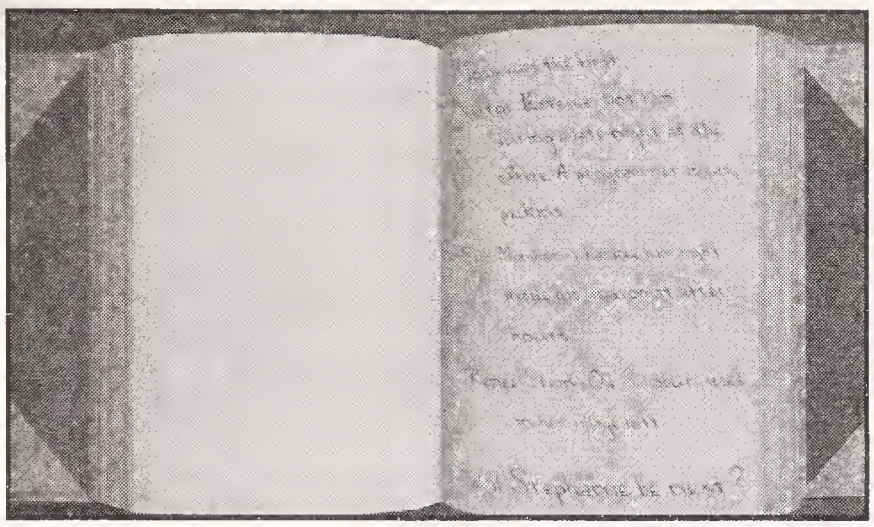
The first thing I noticed upon entering was that it was jam-packed with knives and cloaks and other Ripper paraphernalia. There was a top hat, a cloak, and a gentleman's cane, similar to the one I'd discovered in Catherine's apartment although minus the laser capability. Put these things on, I ruminated, and you might look a lot like the original Jack.

Then I found something that sent a cold chill down my spine—two letters that appeared to be copies of the letters sent to Scotland Yard by the original Ripper. Speak of the devil. They were laid out on a desk as if on display. "Dear Boss," they both began.

I put them down and stepped up the pace of my investigation. I had decided not to linger.

Still, what I had so far was certainly disturbing, but not exactly incriminating—Falconetti had already admitted to me that he was fascinated by the Ripper case, and the wall of knives back in his safehouse made it clear he was a collector of things that interested him.

Then my eyes fell to an open journal on a lectern nearby. I



picked it up and read it quickly, then read it again more slowly. It was another short list; the entries were brief, concise, and incriminating as hell.

"Josie was the first," it said. Then, "Victor Estevez—Got him during a late-night coffee at the office. A programmer is easy pickin's." The hair was standing up on the back of my neck; the victims were all there, listed in the order of their sudden demise. Sam Mendler was next. "Whacked him right inside his laundromat after hours," it read. Then came Renee Stein. The words gloated, in and of themselves. "Old Salisbury died in her village loft," it said.

Salisbury—the name on the mug Magnotta had smashed. Must have been her c-space handle for the Ripper game.

My eyes continued to move in trepidation down the page; I expected the next item to be on Catherine, who had been the Ripper's next sequential victim. But she didn't make it—perhaps because she survived, I speculated. Instead, the last item on the page was a question: "Will Stephanie be next?"

"Yes," I muttered to myself, "you know damn well she was."

Then I hesitated for a moment, trying to assume some semblance of reportorial objectivity. I told myself that perhaps the fact that the Jordan entry was posed as a question had some significance. Was Falconetti trying to guess along with the Ripper here, or was he speculating as to who he could catch and kill next? If I'd had to make a guess, I would have guessed the latter. Falconetti's fascination with the Ripper seemed, suddenly, too profound for anything else.

Either way, though, the list had made clear to me that these people, living and dead, had one solid connection: the Web

Runners' Ripper game in which Josie Dorsett had been killed (I had, at least, confirmed that this was indeed the occasion of Dorsett's death when I'd mentioned it in my conversation with Burton and she hadn't denied it). Now, the question was: Was this list the thing that Stephanie Jordan wanted to show me the night she was killed? She'd certainly acted as if she'd seen her name on a list like this.

The thing I couldn't figure out was what had started it—why had Josie Dorsett been killed in the first place? Was it just a lunatic in gruesome operation? Was someone seeking to avenge her? Or had it been an accident? But perhaps that was like asking why the original Jack the Ripper did what he did. Because.

The only thing that seemed certain to me was that the killer was one of the survivors. It wasn't just that I'd already decided Magnotta, Burton, and Falconetti were the prime suspects—it was

that it was the only thing that made sense. Maybe the killer was a psychopath slowly killing off old associates for the hell of it, or maybe he was killing them off to hide something that only the original Web Runners knew. It seemed certain to me that I had his name right there in my hand. It also seemed certain to me, now, that I was in his WELL. I scanned the list once more; Falconetti's tone sure didn't sound worried, although his name was on a list of people being extinguished one by one.

Then something else occurred to me. The entry in Catherine's notebook that had led me here was one of her last. Was this list the thing that had gotten her too close to the Ripper? And what did I do with it, now that I had it?

I got the hell out of there, feeling, suddenly, a sense of

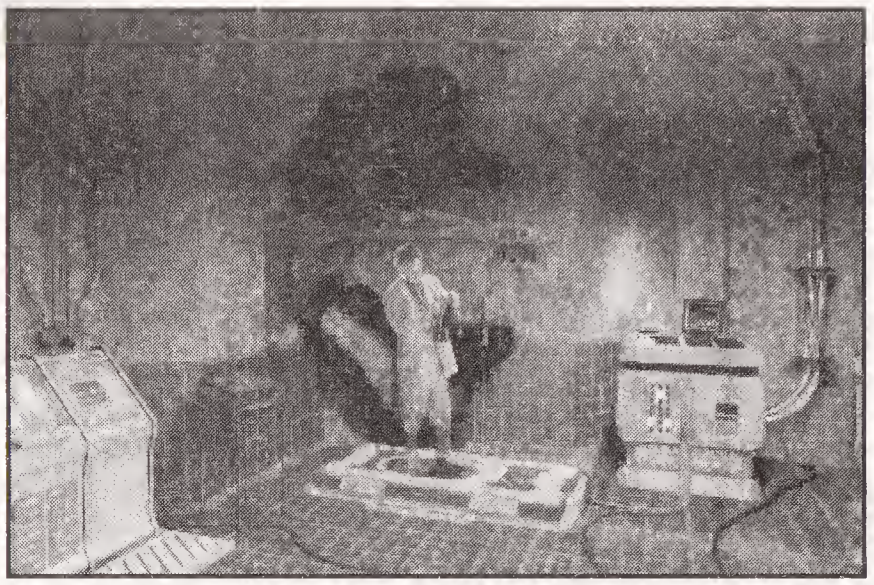
Chapter 28

SHARP BLADE, DULL MEMORY

THERE'VE been times when, putting myself in hazardous situations to go after a story, people have told me I was being stupid. I usually try to engage those people in an intellectual discussion wherein I prove to them via holistic discourse that there's a tenuous demarcation between gutsy and stupid. If that fails, I usually challenge the clod in question to a no-holds-barred drinking competition to make my point. In any event, I would not have made the challenge to anyone who accused me of stupidity for what I did next. The thing is, stupid or gutsy, there are times when you have no choice. You do what you have to do.

And what I had to do next was confront Falconetti. I'd found a deadly weapon in my girlfriend's closet, evidence that Magnotta had a perverted and violent grudge against his fellow Web Runners, even a body in Clare Burton's lab—but none of it seemed as incriminating as the note I'd found in Falconetti's secret stash. It was time to start nailing some of this evidence to a suspect and find out the Ripper's identity before he struck again. And to my mind, Falconetti was now the most likely suspect.

When I got to his safehouse, he was in the process of disengaging himself from the web of wires that connected him to his deck. Apparently, another session of cyber-surfing had just



ended, leaving him in a charged, electric state.

I gave him no time to lapse into his normal pattern of evil antics—I started right off by asking him about the Web Runners. I wanted to keep him off balance before he had a chance to get his reality legs back. As for myself, I was working damn hard not to think about the knives covering the walls around me. Neither worked out as well as I'd hoped.

"Oh man, the Web Runners!" he proclaimed happily. "Those were the days, Quinlan! We had some fun. I was the guru, Magnotta was the brooding Bohemian, and Clare was the straight-laced schoolgirl cutting loose."

"By marrying you?" I followed up.

He became even more jovial. He was really enjoying his stroll down memory lane. "Hey, what can I say?" he shrugged. "It was a perfect day until Magnotta screwed it up."

Even when he was angry, Falconetti seemed to be having fun. He went on with a certain amount of ... gusto. "I mean, I knew he had the hots

for Clare," he continued, "so I didn't invite him. But the bastard shows up anyway. It took four guys to pull him off me. It took five guys to pull me off him. After that, nothing was ever right."

He actually seemed melancholy then ... for about a second. I tried to jump on it.

"You know the Ripper has struck again," I said.

Falconetti looked thoughtful. He muttered for a moment; I thought he said, "He got her, huh?" but I wasn't sure. Still, he didn't seem surprised. "Who'd he get this time?" he finally asked.

"Stephanie Jordan," I told him, waiting to see his response.

But he went on to ask about the scene and whether it had been as bloody and gory as the others.

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "Doesn't that name ring a bell?"

"Nah," he said. "Never heard of her, but —"

I stopped him again. "She was in the Web Runners with you."

"Huh? Oh, yeah, yeah, I remember her. Skinny chick."

"You seem pretty broken up about it."

He just shrugged.

I thought, for a moment, about quizzing him on the contents of his WELL, but then I thought better of it. I had enough on him for now. Suffice it to say that I was happy to get out of there with my skin intact. And in a way, he had given me some answers.

For one thing, there was his

muttering, "So he got her, huh?" It had sounded genuine, and seemed to indicate he didn't know Stephanie Jordan had been killed, but a lack of surprise that she had. As if he hadn't done it, but he knew who had. Of course, I wasn't sure I'd heard him right.

Then there was his story about the wedding. It sounded like Magnotta's disruption had been more violent than I'd thought. It took a whole lot of anger to break up a wedding by assaulting the groom.

They were a weird lot, these Web Runners. And dropping like flies.

I thought I'd better talk to survivor number three, and see what he had to say about it all.

Chapter 29

COPPER CHOPPER VS. PEN-HEAD PINHEAD

I headed off to the police station, wondering whose temper was worse, the slyly seething Falconetti's, or the randomly explosive Magnotta's. I decided that as far as murderousness went, they were dead even.

After a quick stop at the front desk to find out from Lou Brannon that no progress had been made on the Jordan murder, I made my way to Magnotta's office and tried to interrogate *him*, for once. I just thought it might be nice for him to see that it could be done without fisticuffs.

In fact, I started off with something easy—I asked if they'd made any progress in figuring out the murder weapon. I wanted to get as much as I could out of him before I pissed him off. No luck. He seemed pissed off immediately.

"I would say it's a knife," he cracked, his lip curling in that way he had that made even harmless bad jokes sound menacing.

"Farley says that hasn't been established," I countered.

He passed along some scatological musings about Farley's theories. "This isn't rocket science," he concluded. "You can't slice meat with a baseball bat."

"Did you know he was fired?" I asked. "He was close to figuring out the Ripper's murder

weapon—doesn't that seem like a funny time to fire him?"

Magnotta gave it short shrift. "Meta-Cog probably got tired of that idiot dropping his lunch into dead guys' chests," he snorted. "Ever hear about the time his cigarette ignited the formaldehyde he was pumping into a corpse? The guy was a buffoon."

I asked him if he had similar suspicions about Burton's findings.

"She's dragging her feet on treating Catherine," I told him.

"Now you're a surgeon, huh?" he asked.

"I just want to know why you're not investigating her," I said.

"What makes you so sure I'm not?" he sneered.

Dead end. He wasn't going to tell me about whether he was investigating her or not, that much was clear. Interesting to think that he might be, though. I decided to get into things more slowly, let him react to one element at a time.

"I met your friend Falconetti," I said.

"He's no friend of mine," Magnotta spit out.

"Did you know he was married to Burton?" I asked.

"Yeah," he said. "It's not relevant to the case."

"The hell it's not," I said. "One of them could be the Ripper!"

He actually laughed. "Hey, I'm no idiot," he said. "I read your partner's notes too, you know. As far as you two are concerned, I'm a suspect!"

His smarmy, sarcastic manner was catching.

"It would make a good headline, wouldn't it?" I said. " 'Copper Chopper—Magnotta is Ripper.' "

"Yeah?" he retorted. "Try this: 'Pen-head Pin-head: Reporter Has Squat for Brains.' "

I kept at it, starting to pile it on—like I said, it wasn't evidence, but I hoped it would yank his chain. "How come you didn't tell me about the Web

Runners?" I asked. "How come you keep it hidden that you were one of them, that you were an ace decker, that you've known Burton and Falconetti for years? I'm supposed to think there's nothing to any of that?"

"I don't give a damn what you think," he said. "If you're making an accusation, swear out a complaint."

I pulled an ace out of my sleeve. "So you can lift more evidence?"

His reply told me I was starting to make some progress.

"You're walking on thin ice, Quinlan," he said slowly, the venom seething just below the surface, "and if it cracks, ain't nobody gonna hear you scream when you go under."

These weren't answers, they were threats. I knew I was hitting close to home, but I had no idea how close until I returned to the topic of Clare Burton.

"Why didn't you tell me about your affair with her," I tried. I was guessing here. I didn't know if he'd actually had an affair with her or not. But I was guessing that it was his own broken affair with Burton that had precipitated the messy scene at the wedding. And it seemed like I'd hit pay dirt—he didn't deny it, just asked why I thought he was obligated to talk about it.

"If I tell you anything, it's pennies from heaven, scumbag," he told me.

"So were you playing God when you tried to bust up her marriage ceremony?"

This is when he got really hot.

"You just crossed the line," he spit out. "Ask your buddy Falconetti what it's like to be my enemy—a pissed-off cop can make your life miserable in so many ways . . . ."

In his anger, I thought I might be able to get him to cough up

some evidence—I cut him off to ask if he knew about his ex-girlfriend's secret lab.

"What?" he asked. Then he scoffed. "Secret lab!" But I could see he was intrigued, not to mention off balance—he'd been in the process of threatening me, and now I had something he wanted.

I pranced it in front of him as if playing keep-away.

"I've seen it," I told him. "She's got it hidden in some old subway tunnel beneath the Meta-Cog. She's doing lethal experiments on animals in there."

"I don't have time to weep about sheep," he started, but I dangled another tidbit in front of his nose.

"She has Stephanie Jordan's body in there."

He stared for a moment, then as much as admitted he wanted to know more.

"All right, for once you've got my interest. I'll look into it, all right?" he said.

"Not as dumb as you think, huh Magnotta?" I said.

He just smirked. It was as close as he'd ever get to admitting, even begrudgingly, that I'd one-upped him. It was the best I could get, so I made my exit.

Afterwards, however, I realized I'd continued to flesh out my portrait of the suspects. Clearly, Magnotta still had it in for Falconetti, and still had the hots for Burton. At the same time, while it must have been torture for him to have to investigate an old girlfriend, it seemed he was doing it. He obviously hadn't known about her secret lab either, which made me further doubt they were in cahoots on anything—except that they were all united in their elusiveness concerning the Web Runners. More than ever, it seemed the answer was to be found somewhere in the murky history of that fabled group.

I headed off for the Meta-Cog. I'd learned a lot over the last few hours. It was time to plug some of it into Catherine's memory, and see what she came up with.

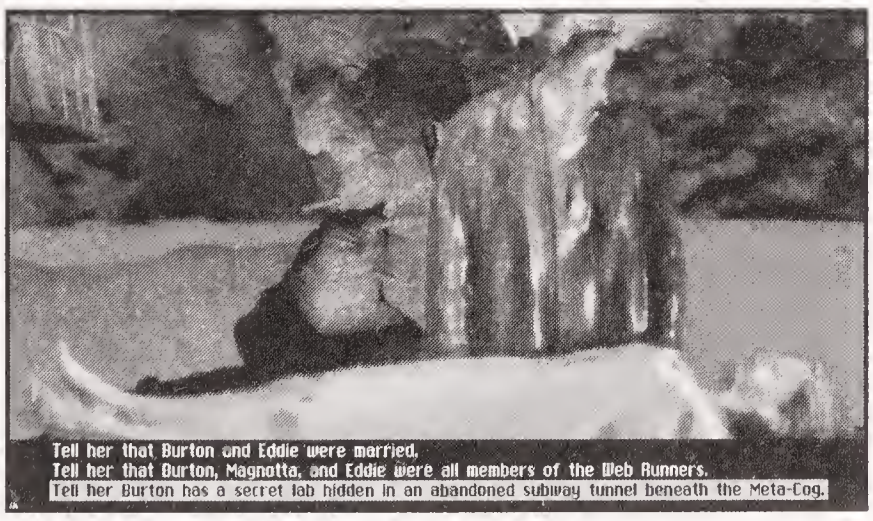
Chapter 30

WELL OF DESIRE

FOR some reason, my trips into Catherine's brain seemed more hair-raising than any other decking experience I've ever had, but once I got there it was strangely comforting, like suddenly being transported, alone, to the most breathtaking landscape imaginable. It was a feeling of frightening wonder that lasted for about a minute. I made my way into her inner sanctum slowly.

I'm not sure what, precisely, I expected from Catherine on this trip, but now that I finally knew some of what she had known at the time of her attack, I guess I hoped to generate some kind of response from her this time. I stood beside her and started in eagerly, telling her that I'd found out about how Burton, Magnotta, and Falconetti had all been in the Web Runners, then about Burton and Falconetti's marriage, and about how Magnotta had disrupted the wedding.

At first, the information elicited no more than a slight moan, but I took it as encouragement and went on. I told her how I'd discovered all these things thanks to her notebook entries. Her reactions slowly grew, and at one point she even screamed. I realized, with this, that I was prodding at some deep, emotional trauma—she'd been nearly killed, after all—but I had no choice; I pressed on, telling myself that at least her



reactions seemed to show her memory was coming back to her. The scream, at least, made that pretty clear.

But it was when I reminded her that Clare Burton had a secret lab buried beneath the Meta-Cog that I got the kind of response I'd been hoping for—she actually sat up, and her virtual eyes—blue as the real thing—even seemed to focus on me. She muttered something incomprehensible; then her eyes went dead again.

I stood up from where I'd kneeled beside her. It seemed hopeless. The moans—the very sound of her—had given me hope at first, but it ultimately seemed hopeless when that was all I could get. Sadly, I booted out of cyberspace and returned to the ICU.

As blue as I suddenly found myself, Bud Cable seemed enthusiastic, nearly wildly so.

"Great work, Mr. Quinlan," he said. "Between your efforts and ours, we've restored about a third of her neurological memory. This is some really terrific progress. Come take a look at the monitor."

He practically yanked my arm out of my socket hauling me over there, but when I saw it, I was glad he'd yanked: The image of the Ripper was remarkably improved. The face wasn't recognizable yet, but it was noticeably better than before.

Cable slapped me on the back and congratulated me once again. "You have to keep this up," he stressed. "Get some rest and try it again as soon as you can."

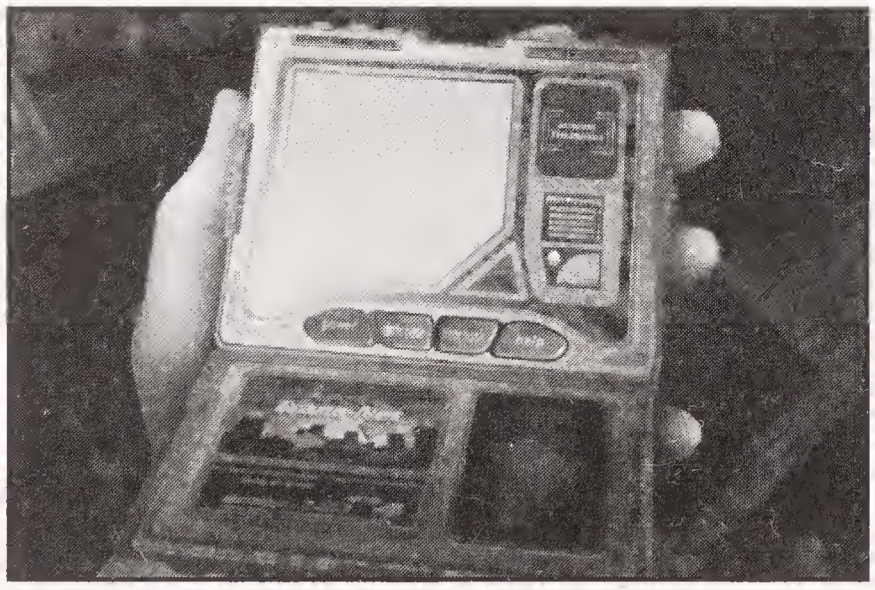
This last comment nearly dampened my enthusiasm—I'd worked like hell to acquire all the information I'd just used on Catherine; now I had to come up with some more. But the fact of the matter was that it was all starting to work—I

was beginning to think I might actually be able to catch this killer, and the process of doing so was saving Catherine as well. It was enough to reenergize me.

I'd just cast one of those anemic, loving looks at her, as if I were a lovesick poet on the moors, when my WAC signaled an incoming message. I figured it would be Ben Dodds, screaming for copy. I was wrong. I recognized the hollow-sounding distortion an instant before he started to speak.

The wavering image of the Ripper appeared concurrent with his voice.

"Dear Boss," he croaked, his electronic basso sending a too-familiar chill down my spine. I tried to bite back my immediate sense of rage; I was standing five feet from my comatose girlfriend. I had to force myself not to curse at him. "I'm having one of those awful days . . . . My mood is foul . . . but luckily I have a hobby to keep me busy . . . ."



He rang off without his classic laugh. Imagine that. A mucked-up serial killer in a thoughtful mood. I didn't know how much longer I'd be able to restrain myself enough to receive his paper-selling messages.

And what kind of message was that, anyway? He'd never contacted me unless it was after a murder before. But then it hit me: He'd indicated his hobby was going to get him out of a bad mood, and his hobby was—

My WAC rang again, and I nearly jumped out of my skin. If he was calling to announce an attack ahead of time, for once, I had to keep him on the line, had to somehow talk him out of it, had to do—*something*.

But Vic Farley's face loomed up on my monitor instead. He looked kind of panicked, as if he'd just received the same message, but of course he hadn't—I was the only one the Ripper would talk to.

"Quinlan, I gotta talk to you, it's urgent," Vic said hurriedly. "I'm on to something big."

"Let's talk," I said; I was distracted, still trying to figure out what to do about the Ripper's message.

But the high stress in Vic's voice brought me back to attention. "Not over the air, Jake," he pleaded. "It's got to be someplace—someplace public. You know the Cafe Duchamp? Go there. But hurry—I won't be there long."

I agreed, still more bothered by the Ripper's message than Vic's, although I was glad to hear from him. I still wanted to find out what had happened to him at the morgue. As for the Ripper's message, well, there wasn't a goddamn thing I could do about it.

I cast a final glance at Catherine, then left for the Duchamp. Vic had said he wouldn't be there long. I had no idea how prophetic his words would be.

Chapter 31

HANDS DOWN, MY WORST DINING EXPERIENCE EVER

AT first, I was glad for the excuse to visit the Cafe Duchamp. I'd been trying to find the time to get there ever since Soap Beatty had told me Gambit Nelson would be the person to ask about the Web Runners. I was hoping he could tell me more about the death of Josie Dorsett. Gambit was there at his usual place just by the door, but the minute I walked in, Vic saw me and frantically waved me over to his table in the back.

The sight of him made me forget all about Gambit Nelson. Vic was cowering in a corner, chugging coffee and chaining cigarettes and casting ceaseless nervous glances around the room.

"Jesus, Vic, what's going on?" I asked as I walked up to him.

He was nearly incoherent for a few moments, grumbling about being fired for getting crumbs in the lab.

"That's why they fired you?" I asked. "For eating in the lab?"

"Yeah," he snorted. "It was just the timing that made me suspicious. Just when I figure out how the Ripper's killing people, they pull the rug out from under me and—"

He was racing so fast I nearly missed it. "Wait a minute," I said. "You figured out what?"

"How the Ripper's doing the murders. I sent a memo to Burton, didn't get a response, went up to see her, she's not there; I come back and some guy from security gives me my notice while his partner cleans out my stuff."

"Slow down, Vic. What exactly did you find out?"

"It was simple once I eliminated the possibilities," he explained. "There was no way a hand could do this, and no blade matched up. So I start trying to figure out what these people had in common, and it hit me—Jake, they were all decked in at the time of their death."

He was calming down, clearly relieved to finally explain to someone whatever it was he was going on about. He certainly had my attention.

"So now I'm thinking cyberspace," he went on. "I looked at the cerebral tissue of each victim and I found small fragments of inorganic nerve impulse code."

He looked at me happily, then realized I didn't understand. He explained it more slowly. "The way I see it, somebody found a way to link to their brains when these people were in c-space and inject what amounts to a self-destruct code into their nervous systems so that they exploded."

Chapter 31

It was still too much to take in.

"I don't get it, Vic," I admitted.

"Look," he said. "Pretend you're an astronaut. On earth, your internal bodily pressure pushing out is the same as the external pressure pushing in. But step out of your suit into space—where there is no external pressure—and you'll blow up from the inside. That's the way the Ripper's code works—it increases your internal pressure. It's that simple."

He smacked his hands together as if he'd just completed a chore. Then he shifted a hand to massage his stomach. It looked like all that coffee had gotten to him.

"Wait a minute," I said. "How come only the torsos explode, and not the head and feet and everything else?"

"Because the guy's an artist!" Vic said, as if in appreciation. But then his stomach grumbled and he went back to rubbing it. "The sliced torso is his signature, just like the original Jack the Ripper. Only thing is, he's one-upped his namesake: He doesn't even have to be there."

Again, his look of grim satisfaction was interrupted by a grimace of discomfort. I hardly noticed, though—I was stupefied by what he'd just told me.

"My God, Vic," I exclaimed. "It's like the perfect crime—killing from cyberspace!" Already, my mind was scrambling through the evidence against my

suspects—such as the fact that Falconetti was one of the most famous c-space hackers ever, that Clare Burton was a world-class cyber-surgeon, that even Magnotta was apparently an expert and innovative decker. And they didn't have to be there to commit the crime. Things were starting to come together.

"You're damn right it's the perfect crime," Vic reiterated. "Which is why I'm never going in there again. Not without some protection. If this guy knew I was on to him, I'd be in big trouble." He gripped his stomach as if to show me, but then I realized his stomachache must have been getting worse. It didn't surprise me, not with the way I'd seen that guy eat. Needless to say, there was a plate of fried food in front of him.

"Christ, my ulcer," he muttered. "I'm not built for this kind of stress."

"You gotta stop eating all that crap," I started to tell him, but all of a sudden, he stood so quickly he knocked his chair over. His face and stomach seemed to be having convulsions, as if he were about to vomit.

"Vic?" I said.

He looked at me, his face contorted in pain.

"Hey Vic, what is it?"

He started to answer, then nearly doubled over. Then he suddenly straightened, as if jerked upright. He dropped his coffee cup and gripped at his gut. His shirt was stretched taut over his stomach; then the buttons popped off.

Chapter 31

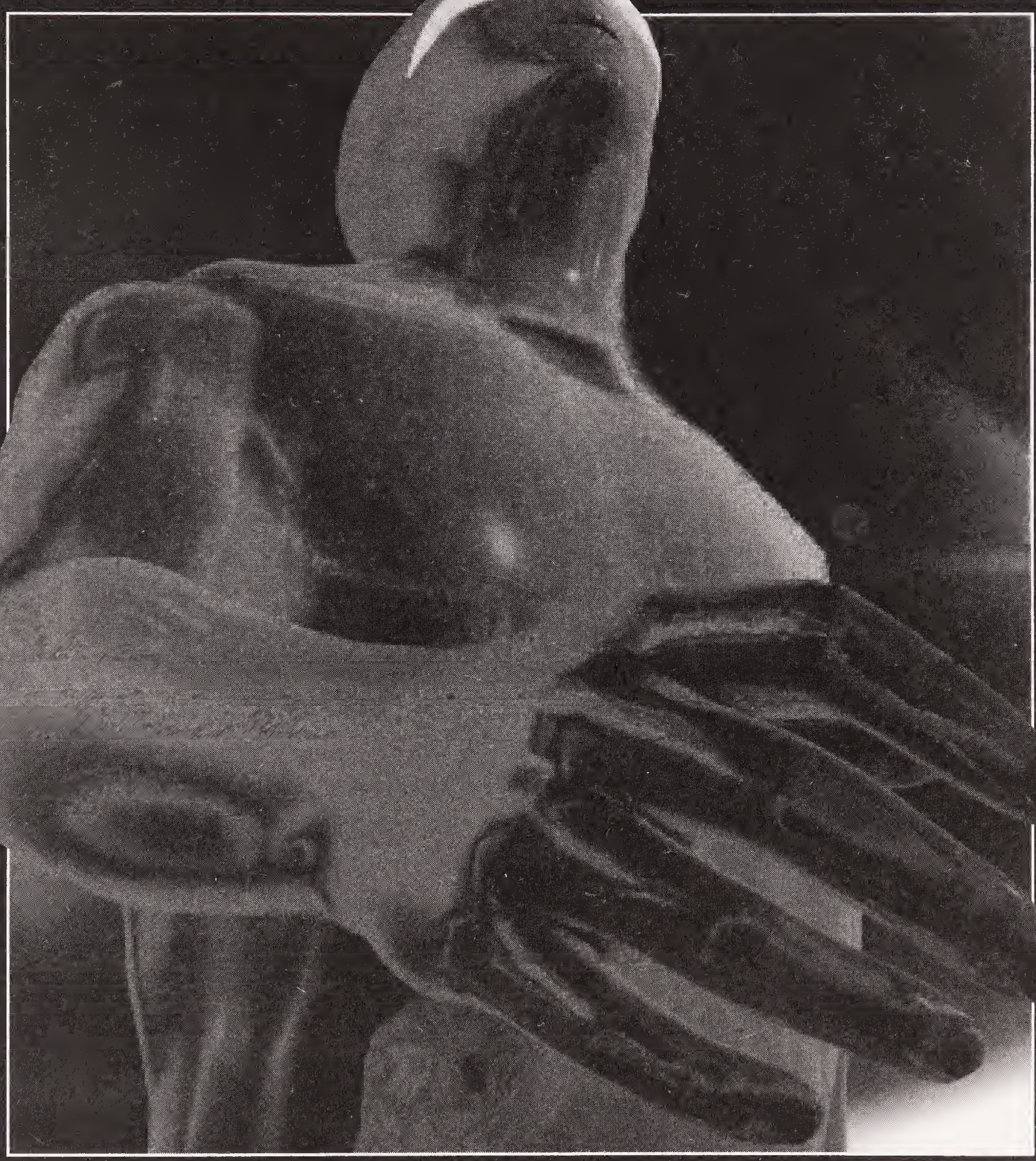
"Vic, what the—"

With an awful wail, Vic Farley exploded before my eyes. There was blood and gore everywhere, on the tables and floor and chairs and walls—blood dripping off ceiling fixtures, dripping off me. At my feet, Vic was sprawled, still convulsing, although his chest was ripped open and his organs scattered about; his leg jerked, the way a spider's would if you pulled it off.

I'd backed away so fast I'd knocked over tables and chairs. I felt more horrified and terrified than I'd ever felt in my life. I looked down and see I was covered in my friend's blood. I'd like to say I made a vow, then, a vow to avenge him. But I didn't. I was too scared. I was scared, and staring at the blood

oozing out of Vic and onto the floor. It was still gushing out of him, pooling around him, and dribbling off in a random series of rivulets coming my way. For a moment, the various crimson strands twisted and crossed until they seemed to resemble writing, and it slowly cut through my horror that that's exactly what it was—the bloody signature of Jack the Ripper, reincarnated.

END OF ACT II



Act Three

Chapter 32

I GET THE MAGNOTTA KICKED OUT OF ME

THE gruesome death of my friend Vic Farley—a disgusting, repulsive, and horrifying event that would cause eternal night sweats for those of us fated to witness it—seemed to make one man happy.

Vince Magnotta pulled me in for questioning. Like many people, Magnotta spoke with his hands. He seemed happy as a pig in the element pigs are said to be happiest in. I still had Vic's blood and tissue on my clothes. And it wasn't long before some of the blood was my own.

I was shell-shocked and handcuffed when I got to the precinct house.

Quickly coming to my senses in the interrogation room, I found myself alone with a vaguely smiling Magnotta.

"Seems like the killer's been under my nose all along," he mused.

"Get these bracelets off me," I barked back.

"I want to know how you did it," he said, looming over me. "I want to know how you killed them." He was actually smiling as he said this, like a little kid looking forward to a bedtime story.

"What are you, high?" I asked.

Magnotta was still smiling as he calmly placed one hand on my neck and leaned on my throat with his forearm; suddenly, his fingers tightened on a nerve while he jammed the forearm into my Adam's apple. The pain was excruciating.

"You don't understand," he said. "I know all about pressure points. The pain's exquisite and it doesn't leave a mark. Not that I give a damn whether I mark you up or not."

He shoved me away and I gulped for air.

"I run this in the paper and everyone's going to think you're the Ripper," I gasped.

It only amused him all the more.

"Hey, you're the only one claiming to get messages from him," he purred. "You're the last one with Powell when she's attacked, the last one to talk to Stephanie Jordan, and I got a whole bar full of witnesses putting you with Farley when he's killed, too."

I didn't need any time to let this sink in. The case he'd outlined would have been pretty conclusive if all it took was circumstantial evidence. I felt as if I were backpedaling from an upper-cut—which, I had a feeling, I would be soon enough.

"Look," I stammered, "didn't it sink in when I told you that before Farley was killed he told me the weapon is in cyberspace? That the killer can rip you apart while he's sipping tea a thousand miles away?"

It was at this point that the imagined upper-cut nearly became real. In fact, the only variance from the vision was that the punch was a roundhouse.

Like a bad trip to cyberspace, I felt the concussive shock of entry into another level of consciousness; when I returned, I found that it's true what they say about seeing stars. For a moment, I thought I could hear them, too—an echoey, whooshing sound that came in painful but diminishing gusts.

I wiped my mouth and my hand came away bloody. I spoke

slowly while I stared at it. "How you gonna explain this, Magnotta?" I asked. I guess I was still thinking that I had the newspaper behind me, and that no matter what Magnotta did to me, the truth—and the power to publicize it—would protect me. I had, in other words, the sense of security of someone who's carrying a concealed weapon.

But it was a false sense of security: Magnotta, it turned out, was carrying a more tactile concealed weapon. He pulled a knife out of his jacket.

A chill shot down my spine and I felt everything inside me clench. I thought he'd lost it completely, I thought the devil was finally out of the proverbial bag. I thought it was all over. I'd found the Ripper.

Magnotta advanced toward me slowly, as if savoring the closing distance. Suffice it to say all thoughts of journalism escaped me. The only truth that mattered, I suddenly knew, was that I was handcuffed in front of a mad man with a knife.

The blade was inches away from my face when Magnotta stopped, stood up straight and slowly raised the knife. I cringed and locked desperate eyes on him. He turned the blade over, grinned at me, and deftly sliced a deep gash on his own forehead, just above his eye. He cut deep, and the blood oozed out, in a pulp.

"Self-defense, man!" he cackled. "I mean, why'd you hit me, Quinlan? Look—you broke the goddamn skin! I'm bleeding!"

I summoned up the teachings of every lefty Zen rag I'd ever read in college in order to still the tumultuous fear and anger I felt inside. I locked my gaze on Magnotta, and it slowly came to me that he wasn't going to kill me, at least not there and then. He was pushing so hard because he had nothing. It was all circumstantial. If he'd had more, he would have booked me. I immediately demanded my freedom.

Magnotta responded with his own moment of contemplation.

He seemed to come to the same conclusion I had.

"You can walk … for now," he said, slowly—and roughly—undoing my handcuffs. "But—" He grabbed me by the lapels, smirked, then slapped me. Hard. It was as if he wanted to make sure he had my attention, as if he wanted to add veracity to the words that followed: "I'm on to you. It's only a matter of time."

There was some heavy-duty jostling as he escorted me to the door of the interrogation room. I shouldered past him, doing my best to appear cool and contemptuous. But when the door closed behind me, I heaved the mother of all sighs of relief.

I strode out of the police station like I owned the place, kept going until I was around the corner, then collapsed against a wall. I hurt all over from the various places Magnotta had slapped, pinched, or punched me. I saw his smirking face again, looming up in my mind's eye. He'd made it clear he meant to hurt me, and hurt me bad. He wanted to hurt me physically, psychically, existentially, you name it. Every way he could.

I experienced a moment of real fear then. The son of a bitch would find a way to frame me, I was suddenly sure. Or maybe worse … .

I rubbed my jaw and thought about the knife he'd had been waving around. It seemed Joey Falconetti wasn't the only one with a thing for blades. I was more certain than ever that one of them was the Ripper, imitating the cut of a knife in cyberspace. Or was it Burton, who'd already shown she could kill monkeys with an algorithm?

Then I noticed a passerby looking at me in horror before scooting away, and I gazed down at my shirt front and saw the still-vivid crimson of Vic Farley's blood. All the speculation gave way to the image of Vic being rent open. I went home as fast as I could, locked the door, drew the blinds, and sat in the darkness. At some point, I got up and unplugged my computer. Then I sat down again, feeling the darkness close in around me.

Chapter 33

DECKING WITHOUT A HELMET

AFTER Magnotta laid me low, I decided to stay at my apartment for a while. I slept fitfully, made some food and looked at it, hovered by the window scrutinizing the empty street. I kept expecting to hear a knock on the door, followed by his familiar slimy voice saying, "Open up, asshole. It's all over." The knock never came, though, and I realized that Magnotta wasn't coming up with anything that would allow him to bust me.

The problem was I had nothing to pin on anyone, either. Nothing that would clear me of suspicion, let alone stop the real killer. What I needed was a witness, but how do you get a witness to an invisible murderer? There was Catherine, of course, but I had nothing that would constitute another building block to her memory. All my avenues of investigation seemed to have come to—no pun intended—dead ends.

And in the meantime, I was starting to lose it. I was in some kind of walking coma. I kept thinking I saw shadows in my peripheral vision. If I made a quick movement I saw tracers. Sleep was momentary at best, and came with a nightmare rush of psychedelic imagery; it was like decking into hell. Maybe it was the beating from Magnotta, the pressure of constant fear, or simple, massive sleep deprivation. Whatever it was, it left me jangly and scared, and completely bereft of any idea at all of how to proceed. I felt as if I were a dead man already.

It was somewhere in this fog of fear that an idea finally came to me. There were six people who knew for sure who the Ripper was: I was still working on Catherine, and I'd exhausted my leads on the late Sam Mendler, Victor Estevez, Renee Stein, and Stephanie

Jordan. But there was one more victim whom I realized I hadn't fully investigated ... Hamilton Wofford. Now that I knew about the killer acting in cyberspace, the fact that Hamilton Wofford had been building a virtual version of the original Ripper's killing place suddenly had an eerie relevance. Was it a cyberspace place for a cyberspace killer? I was certain that it was, and that whoever had contracted Wofford to build it was indeed the Ripper.

On top of that, there was the fact that I hadn't found out everything there was to know about Hamilton Wofford himself—his mysterious assignment, his death—because I hadn't wanted to upset the surviving Covington. So I'd backed off on fully investigating Hamilton. Now, there was no chance of interrogating Hamilton, of course, because he was a dead man, but the fact of the matter was that he was a dead *business*man—there had to be records of his various transactions with whoever had contracted him. What's more, he conducted his business out of his home; maybe his employer had visited him, and therefore maybe Covington—who was addled but perceptive, not to mention still alive—had seen something. Despite his disclaimers, I suddenly realized that Covington *must* know something ... something he didn't know he knew.

It was enough to get me on my feet and moving toward the door of my apartment, checking my pockets out of habit and finding all my usual tools: WAC, pencil, notebook. Hand on the doorknob, I thought of one more implement I hadn't used in a while. I went to my night table and slid a hand into the drawer. It was stuffed with old paperbacks and it took a moment to find what I was looking for: my antique but serviceable snub-nosed revolver. I tucked it behind my belt and headed for Central Park, still a little woozy and still seeing tracers, but ready to shoot a few back.

I didn't realize how woozy I was, however, until I was standing in front of the Wofford cottage feeling as though my eyes couldn't focus on it. It was dark and foreboding, not the cheery little place

Chapter 33

I'd visited just a few days before, when it had resembled something out of an alpine fairy tale. It still bore the fairy-tale resemblance—but a fairy tale in the style of Grimm. The house was dark, I realized … too dark. It looked like nobody was home. But I couldn't imagine Covington Wofford not being there; as far as I knew, his brother had left him well-off and with caretakers looking after him. There was no need for the poor soul to ever go out and risk the streets. And he'd struck me as the kind of person who never *did* go out. When I'd last seen him, I had the impression he would be wandering the house for days, shifting from room to room, trying to understand how his safe, secure life had changed. He had to be in there.

I looked at my watch; it was just after dark, only eight o'clock. So how come there weren't any lights on?

I crept up the front walk slowly, my eyes scanning the bushes and the darkness around me. I backed up the steps, certain I'd seen a shadow move, then realized it was the wind rustling the leaves. I turned and raised a hand to knock, then saw the front door was ajar. I slipped my gun out of my belt and nudged the door open.

"Mr. Wofford?" I called out, stepping slowly inside. "Hello?" I kept the gun in front of me, sweeping it from side to side.

I paused and waited for my eyes to become acclimated to the darkness; then I heard the scuffling.

I darted away from the doorway's backlight just as I heard Covington Wofford's muffled cry for help.

"Don't move!" I shouted, just as I was able to make out the old man struggling with a dark figure. I called for the lighting system to engage and it snapped on, sparking the glint of something metallic at Covington's throat.

"Freeze!" I screamed at the black-robed figure clutching him.

The attacker reacted quickly, turning the old man loose and tossing him aside to spring into the shadows. I fired quickly, once, then twice, and heard the sickening sound of a bullet hitting home. Dashing between shadows, I saw the intruder grasp at a shoulder but charge on regardless. I caught a glimpse of him leaping for the nearby French doors and I fired again. The slug whacked into the door jam with a loud splintering of wood. The intruder was gone.

I ran to the old man, my heart pounding, the whole thing seeming like a real-life version of the kind of wicked altered reality filling my head lately.

"Are you all right?" I bellowed.

He was dazed, his eyes glazed over.

"Are you hurt?" I boomed.

He swiveled his head to look at me with sudden annoyance.

"No, I'm not hurt," he scoffed. "I'm dead! Dead, I tell you!"

The crabby old geezer nearly made me laugh.

"Not quite," I told him.

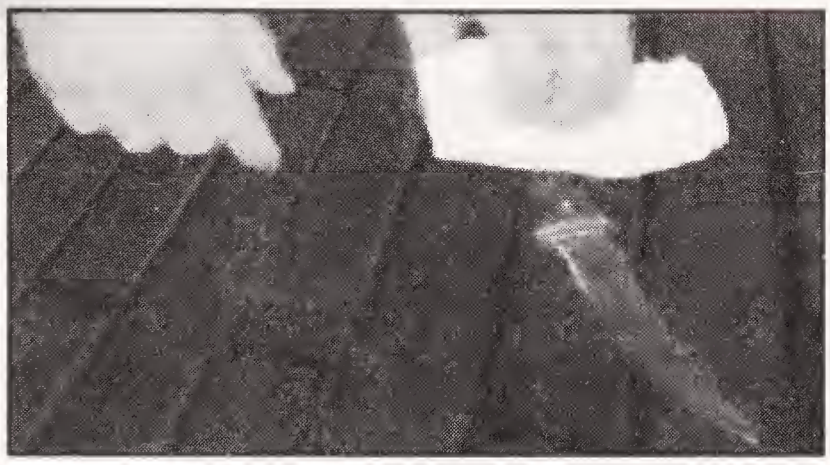
"It's just a matter of time!" he wailed.

I helped him to his feet but something caught my eye as I did so: The intruder had dropped the knife. There was a splotch of blood on the floor nearby.

I dropped to my haunches and took out my WAC. I scanned the knife for fingerprints while the old man came over and followed my gaze.

"I think I hit him in the shoulder," I explained.

Chapter 33



"Oh God, now we've got a wounded animal on our hands!" he moaned.

He paced for a moment and I tried to soothe him, but his brush with death had overwhelmed him.

"I'm through, I tell you," he muttered over and over. "I'm not waiting around to be killed."

"Look," I told him. "You've got to help me. I'm sure the person who killed your brother was the Ripper."

He stopped pacing and looked at me. "You saved my life," he said. "I ... I know now that I can trust you. Here."

He pulled a disk out of his pocket and handed it to me.

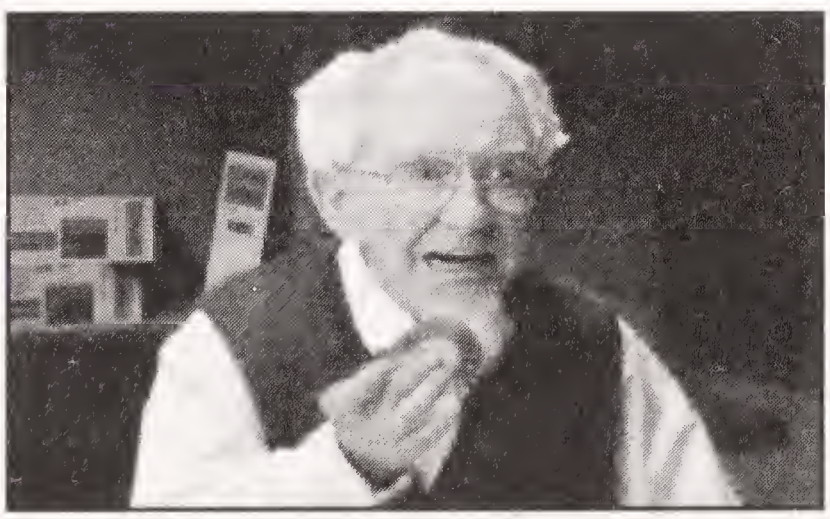
"What's this?"

"Hamilton stored an AI of himself on that," he told me. "I'll upload him into our WELL so you can deck in and talk to him. Maybe he'll be able to give you some clue as to who killed him. You talk to him. I'm getting the hell out of the city."

"You mean I can actually talk to him?" I asked, stunned by my good luck.

"Yes, yes!" he hissed. "Now get out of my way!"

I marveled at the modern world for a minute—imagine, talking to a dead man—then caught Covington by the arm and pleaded with him to stay and help me.



He wasn't as preoccupied as usual, though. His mind was clearly focused on leaving, and nothing I said could make him listen ... and to tell you the truth, I couldn't blame him. I wished I could run, too. But I couldn't. He went off to throw some clothes in a bag, and I

headed for the door.

It made me sad to leave him, though. I'd grown to like the old guy, and I was sorry for anybody to have their life fall apart like that, especially at an age when you should just be smelling the roses. All the more reason to catch the killer—it would be nice to have a friend in Central Park. A living friend.

I checked the grounds carefully before heading back to the police station. I'd left the knife behind—I didn't need to give Magnotta the opportunity to slap me with a tampering-with-evidence charge to add to everything else—but a quick double-check of my WAC informed me that I now had not only a virtual image of the weapon, but some fingerprints to boot. At least if Magnotta swiped this evidence the way he'd purloined so many other clues in the case, I'd still have what I needed. That is, if I could get a little help from the friendly neighborhood desk sergeant—I'd need to get into police records to run down these prints. I sank into the back seat of a cab and closed my eyes as if to make a wish.

Before I knew it, I'd dozed off into a thin sleep, and I had the strangest dream, the kind of weird, hyper-realistic dream you have sometimes when you take a short nap in the afternoon … the kind of jittery experience I seemed to be having more and more lately:

I was staring at the WAC again, the knife and blood stain on the floor behind it. I'd just scanned the knife and everything was exactly the same except—there were no fingerprints on the knife … .

And then the cabbie was talking to me. He sounded annoyed.

"Hey, I said we're here," he told me.

I sat up straight and looked around. I don't know what I expected. All I saw was an ugly precinct house and an even uglier cabbie.

But I was spooked. These damn visions were getting a little too vivid; this one was more like a flashback than a dream. But it hadn't happened the way I'd just imagined it, I was sure. It was

just a dream, I told myself. I'd just found the first real, tactile evidence in the entire investigation—the actual prints of the Ripper—and I was so nervous about getting it to the police that my fears had taken over my unconscious thoughts. That's what I told myself, anyway—that it was just a dream.

I stopped on the way into the stationhouse to double-check my WAC. The prints were still there. I registered this with relief and headed inside.

Then I heard bells as I crossed the lobby to the elevator. I nearly pulled out my gun, there in the middle of cop-world, until I realized it was my WAC. I had an incoming message. It could be from you-know-who. I didn't feel I could handle that at the moment. I ignored it and made for the elevator.

I went right to Lou Brannon's desk and begged him to run a check on the prints, convinced the case was about to be cracked. Lou, though, didn't seem to catch the importance of what I was telling him. In fact, he hemmed and hawed for a few moments, his eyes never meeting mine. He was acting strange, and I wondered if he, too, was thinking that the preponderance of circumstantial evidence was making me look bad.

"Look, Lou, I can prove I'm innocent if you'll just give me a hand," I pleaded.

He got a sheepish look on his face and I could tell I'd read him accurately. He felt guilty for suspecting me, and relented and ran the check.

"Bingo," he said. "They belong to a thug named Jellyroll Wilson. He's nothing, though. No sense looking for him. I'm sure he was just following orders."

A hit man. I was disappointed to realized that I hadn't caught the Ripper, but maybe the Ripper was the guy who'd hired this Jellyroll character. "And whose orders might that be?"

"Guy named Vigo Haman. Ever hear of him?"

I'd heard of him, all right. He was a major figure in the Soho mob, specializing in cyber-crimes. He was an expert at pirating code, hacking security systems, and all the other new and fashionable opportunities for crime that have developed in the virtual world. And he was notorious about protecting his interests in the real world, although he wasn't known as a killer.

Lou told me the Soho Corps had staked out Haman at the Duchamp a few times and it was a safe bet I'd find him there.

Lou got a call then and had to spend some time yelling at someone, so I took my leave. It was time for me to play out another hunch. I headed for Magnotta's office.

The slimeball brightened at the very sight of me.

"Well, look who's back!" he said. "How's your face?"

I nearly burst out with an angry spiel about how thanks to the beating he'd given me I was beginning to feel as if I were in several states of reality at once—all of them bad—but then I clamped it down; this was exactly the sort of complaint that would make his day. He'd love to hear I was seeing things that weren't there and dreaming things that scared me to death. I launched right into the questions instead.

I started out by giving him one last chance to cough up Catherine's WAC. I'd already decided I was going to break into his apartment to look for it if he refused.

"Stop me if I'm wrong," he said. "But haven't we had this conversation before?"

"It belongs to the paper, Magnotta, and now the paper wants it back," I bluffed.

"Well then, tell the paper to file a complaint with the district

judge and see how long it takes them to get a hearing."

He was in a completely unflappable mood, I could tell. I guess it's easy to be unflappable with someone you have recently pummeled the crap out of. I decided the only response was not to be submissive; I immediately followed up by telling him I knew about the Ripper game the Web Runners used to play. I got virtually the same response I'd gotten from Clare Burton.

"So what do you want, a Pulitzer?" he asked sardonically. "I suspect Falconetti and Burton almost as much as I suspect you."

I tried to pursue it, though, by asking about the death of Josie Dorsett.

"I busted Falconetti for it," he said.

"But he walked, didn't he?"

"So what's your point?"

"That I think you know more than you're letting on."

It appeared I had inadvertently removed myself from the suspect list with this statement.

"You don't have a clue, do you?" he muttered. "You're not smart enough to be a suspect. See, this guy's not just into the killing—he's into the power, the intimacy of going inside someone. He's into feeling the blood and watching it splatter. And he's going to go on savoring it all until I stop him, see? Because I'm the only one who can. Because I know what drives him to it. So don't you dare think you understand the killer ... or me."

I pointed out the obvious, which was that the killer and Magnotta might be one and the same. More than ever, this little speech seemed to indicate that this was a distinct possibility.

"You've got clues and suspects coming out of your ass and you

do nothing about it," I told him.

"Is that so?" he responded. He pulled something off his desk and slapped it on my chest. "Take a gander at that, asshole. It's a picture of the Ripper. We've got him in a cell downstairs."

I peeled it off my chest and stared at it.

"Falconetti?" I said—a question, not a statement; something wasn't right.

"I didn't trust Burton, so I had department angels deck into your girlfriend's mind and upload everything she had on the Ripper. They came up with our killer."

All I could do was stare at him. Clearly, he felt the conversation—not to mention the investigation was over. But I couldn't help it. Whether Falconetti was the Ripper or not, I knew the picture was bogus, and besides, I had one more question for him: I'd noticed him rubbing his shoulder during our talk. It had set off a little red light in my head. Maybe Jellyroll Wilson hadn't been the one I'd shot at the Wofford place. Maybe that knife was just another piece of evidence that a certain detective had lifted from another case.

"What's wrong with your shoulder, Magnotta?" I tried to sound casual.

"Everything's a clue to you, Quinlan, huh?" he snarled. Then he got that wicked smile on his face. "I was interrogating a suspect," he said. "Didn't go easy on him like I did with you."

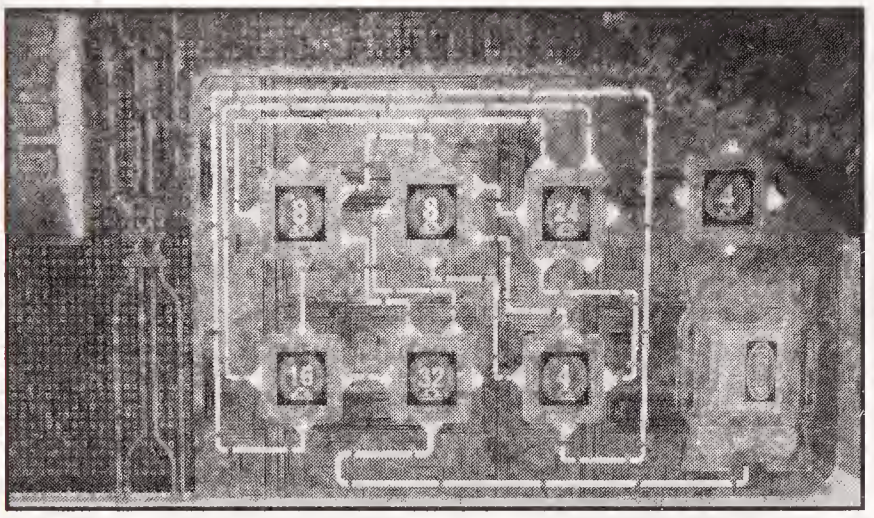
It was one of those occasions that screamed out for an equally macho retort—something that involved a very long string of expletives—but I let it go. Instead, I walked out, and heard Magnotta's derisive laugh ring out behind me as I closed the door. It only made me all the more determined to have the last laugh.

Chapter 34

I TALK TO A DEAD GUY, HE'S PRETTY HELPFUL

WHEN I got back out on the street I felt stable enough to look at the WAC message I'd gotten earlier. It turned out to be e-mail from Gambit Nelson. He said our last talk had prompted him to visit Falconetti's secret WELL, and he'd found something interesting there. I made a note to go there and check it out after I made one more stop. I was through pussy-footing. I wanted Catherine's WAC back, and I was determined to get it.

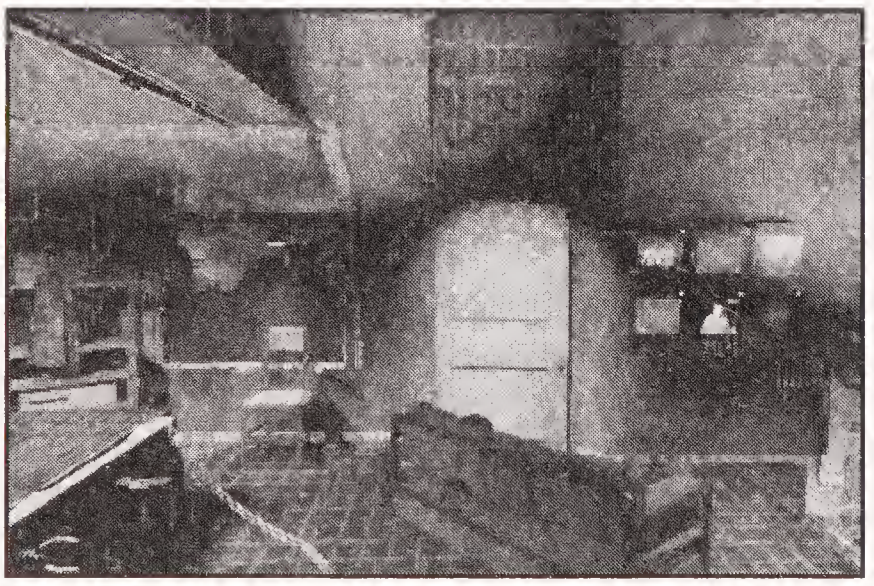
I knew the location of Magnotta's apartment from his personnel file, and when I arrived I found myself in exactly the kind of seedy neighborhood I'd expected him to live in. His building was a dump, just like all the other buildings on the block—except for one thing: Magnotta's building was fronted by a hell of a big steel door that had a high-tech lock on it. The lock was armed with defensive weaponry that bordered on offensive weaponry; it looked like something developed by NASA. But at least it wasn't a voice lock, and if there's one thing a good investigative reporter knows about, it's the fine, old-fashioned art of lock-picking. In my younger, more scrupulous days, I wouldn't have even considered such an act. But I wasn't so young anymore. In fact, I was getting older by the minute ... especially if you consider that getting older means getting closer to death.

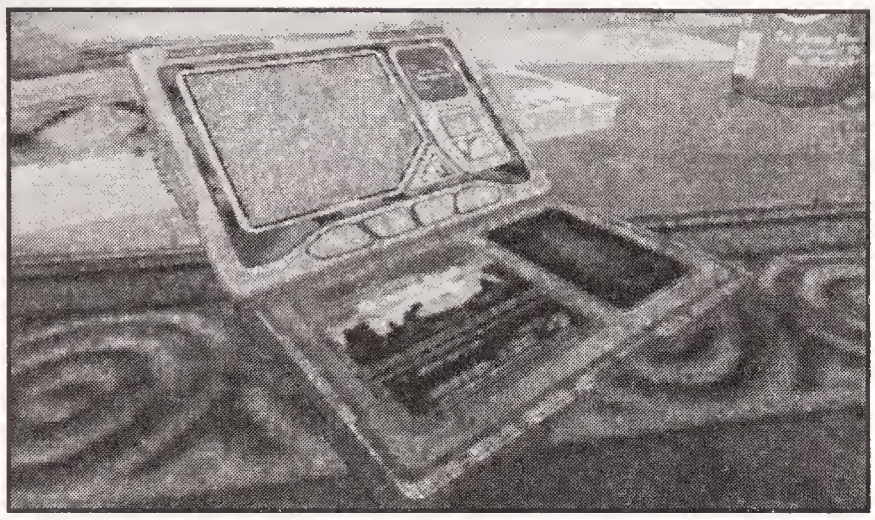


I recognized that the lock had a two-part system, the electronic control being hidden in what looked like a meter box beside the door. I also knew from experience (an experience that involved handing a wad of bills to a Con Ed meter reader) that the code for the entry keypad was encrypted on the meter. I spotted the key number in its usual place, a lonely meter located to the right of all the others. This one had the number 4 on it. I divided the rest of the numbers on the other meters by this number and came up with 226481. Then I took this to the entry keypad on the other side of the door. I typed it in and—bingo—the massive metal door swung open. And some people just left a spare key under the mat.

Once inside, I found a shabby, one-room apartment that matched the shabbiness of the neighborhood—that is, if you overlooked the amazing assortment of high-tech computer equipment the place was stuffed with. There were state-of-the-art computers, numerous variants of decking ports, even a decking chair. Clearly, Magnotta had saved some money by not decorating.

But I was in a cop's apartment and the cop didn't know it; I had to hurry before he found out. I quit ogling the equipment like a kid in a candy store and started rummaging for Catherine's WAC. I found it about five seconds later, sitting on a cluttered desk next to the bed. Magnotta had made no effort





to hide it, and I suddenly realized that his cock-sure sense of imperviousness could work in my favor; I scanned the contents of Catherine's WAC into my own and left it right where it was, so he'd never suspect I'd been there. Then I made for the door, pausing only to give brief study to a neon sign hanging on the wall. The letters twisted into the word "Clarence." God knows what case that piece of evidence came from. Then I got the hell out of there.

I caught a cab and headed back to the newsroom for the first time in days, studying Catherine's final notebook entry on the way. It revealed that she had become convinced that the clue to the Ripper's identity was hidden in the final, deadly game of the Web Runners' Jack the Ripper role-playing game that had taken place fifteen years before. It was the final entry she'd made before she, too, was attacked, which only led me to believe that she was right in her deduction.

I got another WAC message when I arrived at *The Herald*, and this time, it was the message I'd been expecting: the Ripper, calling to gloat over his butchery of Vic Farley. He seemed to enjoy the fact that I now knew how he was operating, and he suggested that I share the information with my readers. "Tell them no one is safe," he said, "from the Ripper."

I felt woozier than ever

after he signed off. The spookiness of his messages, the wavering quality of his image and voice, made me feel like I'd had another one of my weird visions. I slouched against the wall of the newsroom and wondered if, instead of killing me, the Ripper was somehow driving me insane. I wondered if this man who knew how to kill through cyberspace also knew how to implant raw fear and lunatic psychosis, if he knew how to screw up my retinal memory as well as my thoughts. His message had summoned up the gory image of Vic bursting open, and when I closed my eyes I wondered if something similar was happening to my brain.

It was Ben Dodds who shook me out of it. He'd popped out of his office when he saw me and called me inside ... but not without a hesitant stare first. I could see how miserable I looked reflected in his eyes.

"By God, that thug really did a number on you, didn't he?" he said when I slumped into his sanctum. It took me a moment to realize he was talking about Magnotta. "I heard all about it and I've already got our lawyers filing a complaint," he went on. "Magnotta's not going to get away with this."

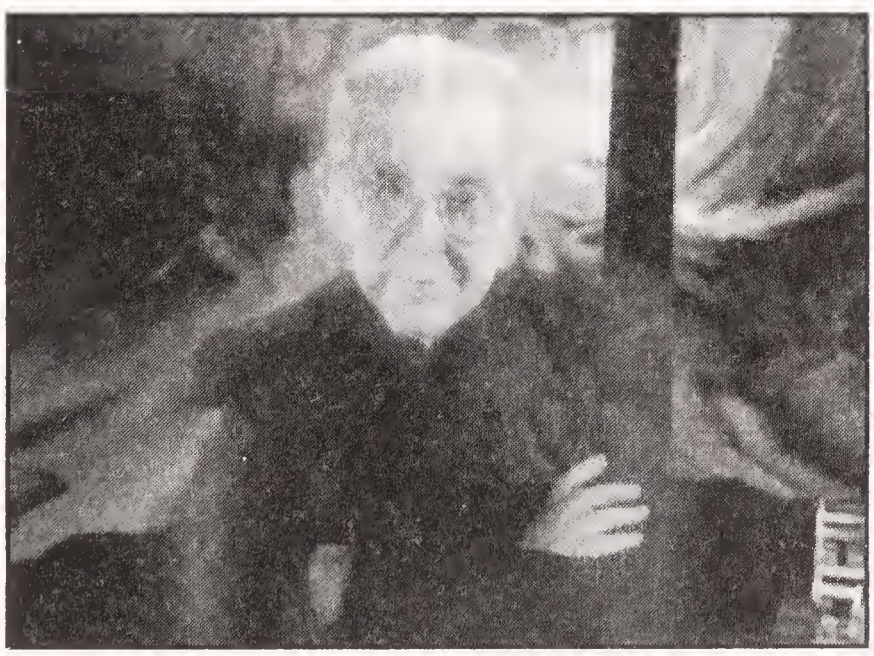
Given my condition, I had the feeling Lou was about to give me one of those vacations reporters hate to get—the one they give you when you're not getting anywhere on a story. I quickly revived myself enough to update him on my latest findings, telling him about the attempted murder of Covington Wofford and letting him know that I might be on to something there. Ben

gave me some more background on Vigo Haman and then—for reasons that still aren't clear to me—I voiced some of my suspicions about Catherine by asking him a few thinly veiled questions about what she had told him when he hired her. We both had a moment's pause then, because it turned out she'd told each of us a different story about where was from.

We mulled it over for a moment, then Ben let me know how wrong I was about him. He didn't give me a vacation. He told me he thought I was doing a remarkable job, considering what I was up against. Then he barked at me to get back to work.

I did. I figured in my state of mind, what better place to be than cyberspace, where mental distortion and shooting imagery were par for the course? I decked my virtual fanny to the Wofford WELL.

It's always kind of spooky, talking to an AI that takes the form of a holograph. But as I've said, I felt like a wavering holograph myself at that point, and the image of Hamilton Wofford that I found waiting for me actually made me feel at home. He was a more kempt version of Covington, and his combination of mental acuity and personal warmth set me right at ease. He was, in short, a comforting presence, and he made me feel all the more comfortable when he informed me that he'd constructed a weapon to use against the Ripper—for as it turned out, Hamilton had indeed come to suspect that it was the Ripper who'd hired him to build a virtual version of Whitechapel, the original Jack the Ripper's killing ground in Victorian London. He had little to offer me by way of identifying his employer—he'd been contacted exclusively through



cyberspace, by a data angel that sometimes assumed the shape of a man, and sometimes of a woman—but he was confident about the weapon. In fact, he was so confident that he'd segmented it into three pieces and hidden the pieces in WELLs he labeled Weapon One, Two and Three. I got the impression that Hamilton knew he'd never have the chance to use the weapon himself, so he'd hidden it for his brother, first constructing the thing then concealing it so thoroughly that I had no doubt about his assumptions; he'd taken all the care of a master craftsman, which is what he was, and which is what I knew it would take to beat the Ripper.

The Ripper was a master craftsman, too, of course, but not on the order of Hamilton Wofford. I knew that now I had a leg up on the killer. He'd made a mistake. He thought he'd killed the one person who could reveal his identity. He didn't understand that the work of artists and craftsmen live on—wily old Hamilton Wofford had seen to that.

I learned all that I could from the old architect, asking him everything I could think of, until I became uncomfortable being there—not because of his manner, but simply because he kept addressing me as "Covington," and "Cov." He'd been expecting his brother to be the one addressing him, and had programmed his AI accordingly. He simply wasn't capable of recognizing anyone else, and so I felt intrusive. When I had gotten everything out of him that his AI could provide, the holograph snapped into a pre-recorded good-bye message to Covington that nearly left me in tears. Not to mention in a rage at the bastard who had done this to him.

I booked out and went after the pieces of the weapon that I knew would be my only chance—anybody's only chance--to stop the demon. But for once, I knew that at least I had a chance.

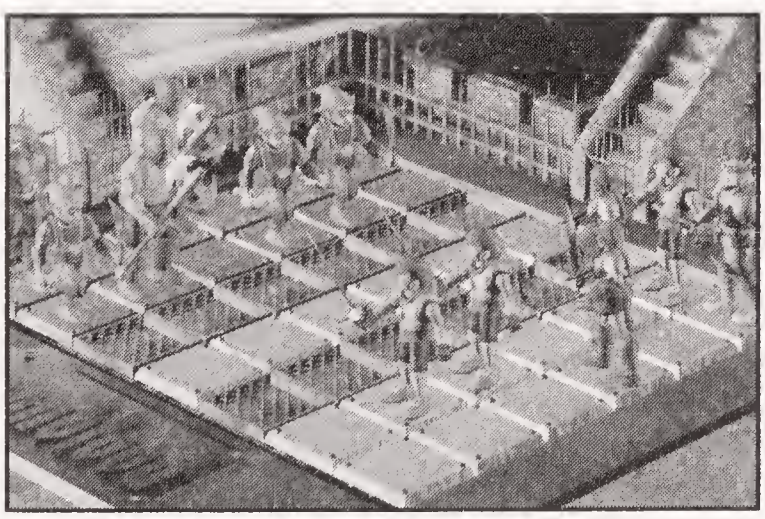
Chapter 35

THEY SAY IT'S BLISS

GATHERING the pieces of Hamilton Wofford's cyber-weapon was no mean feat, but the weird state of mind I'd been in lately proved helpful. In other words, I was so gonzo from lack of sleep and a crushing fretfulness that I couldn't think straight. I'd achieved the ultimate version of that non-thinking state I mentioned earlier: I acted out of pure reflex. If you'd asked me what time it was, I'd have kicked the crap out of you without a moment's hesitation. Bad way to be in a clock factory, but a good way to be when encountering ICE.

Of which there was plenty in Hamilton Wofford's weapon WELLs. Who'd have thought that such a nice old man would be such a devious ICE-maker? First, he'd given me this list of passwords that was sedate, erudite, learned: "Pegasus," "Orestes," "Odysseus." Then he sent me to a WELL where the ICE was a giant rat. Go figure.

Actually, he threw me for a loop before the giant rat. The first weapon WELL I went to had ICE that took the form of a chess game. I thought: But of course, and the next WELL will have a puzzle in which I parse a sonnet. It seemed completely in keeping with the man's character. But no. I settled into this game of nice, holographic chess, and I observed that there were fewer pieces than the last time I played chess, which was when I was about twelve and there wasn't a hot stick around for me to stick in my eye. Anyway, I settled into



it, and the rules started to come back to me, and everything was copacetic. There were some female archers, which I don't remember from when I was a kid, but they're cute and I figure, Fine, in the game, I'm the king, and that's pretty nice, too. Eventually I lost a pawn. Big deal.

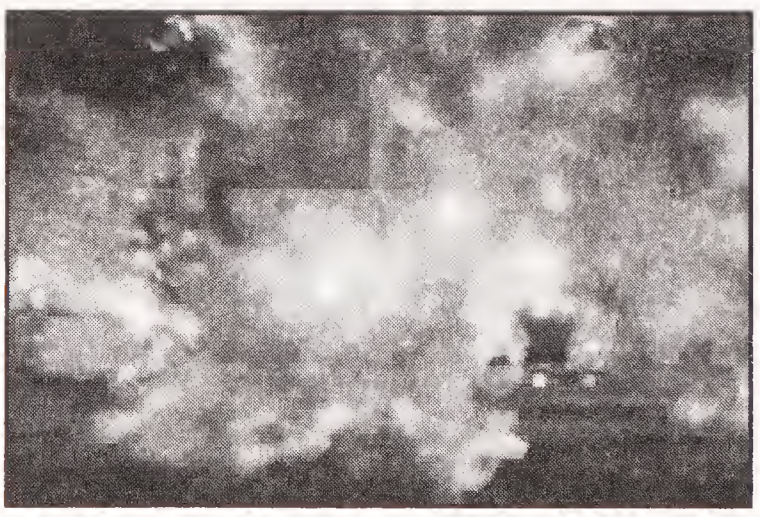
But losing my pawn made his pawn turn into a dragon.

It took me a while to crack that one.

Then came the WELL with the four-armed, fire-breathing demon who could disappear at will. This was out-and-out combat. I was afraid if I shot him he'd turn into a pawn or something, but then I saw he had a blue orb stuck in his forehead.

What a four-armed, fire-breathing demon was doing with a blue orb stuck in his forehead, I couldn't say, but I knew a clue when I saw one. I shot the hell out of that orb, and I got the next piece of the sandwich.

Then came the giant rat. This was out-and-out combat, too. I just shot him in the eye. I figured when in doubt, always shoot a giant rat in the eye. You can't lose. If you don't kill him, at least he can't find you to gnaw on you. After I'd hit it about thirty times, though, the rat blew up. I'll say this about Wofford: His ICE flamed out pretty cool. I got the third and last piece of the weapon, and I booked out of that sewer.



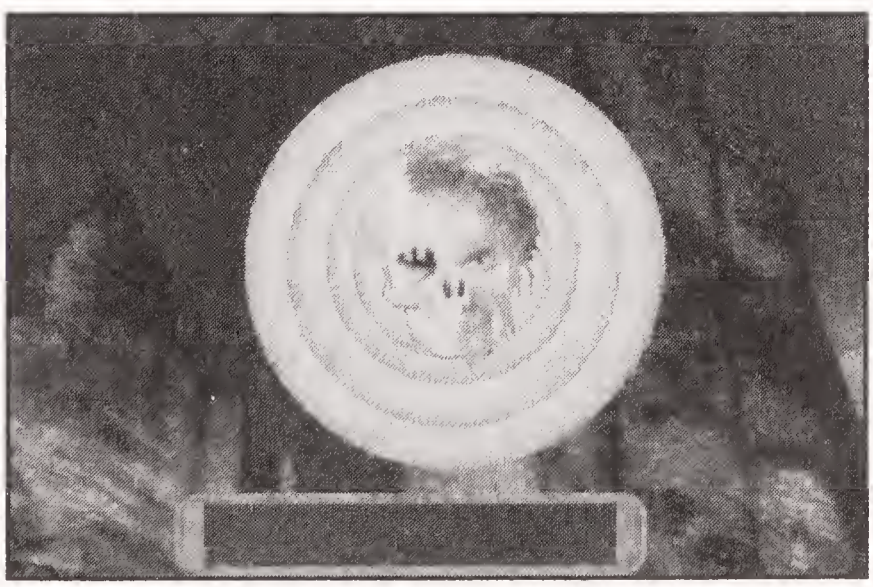
Which was all well and good and entertaining, but it had taken me completely out of the story I was involved in—you know, the one where my life was in imminent danger because I was trying to catch a serial killer?

Chapter 35

I was almost annoyed at Wofford then. I thought he'd understood. I mean, I was constructing *his* weapon, a weapon with which I intended to kill. I'd expected some serious ICE—something meant to protect his work and keep it from falling into the wrong hands. He was, after all, the genius everyone called another Leonardo. He'd turned his amazing intellect toward weaponry, just like Leonardo had, and he'd come up with something cutting-edge, ingenious, definitive. And then he'd cloaked his masterful work with the stuff of arrested adolescence—all this fantasy-world crap, the knights and demons and dragons, the chicks in armor like something from a teenager's wet dreams.

The point was I had no time for meaningless games. This was a serious business. I had to put aside the distraction and get myself back into a state of utter desperation, where I had the proper perspective on things, where I was fully focused on the Ripper and nothing but the Ripper. Because that was the only way I was going to get out of this thing alive.

So I decided that while I was in cyberspace I'd follow up on the lead Gambit Nelson had e-mailed to me earlier—the one about the book he'd seen in Falconetti's WELL. If there was one place in c-space that was going to get me back in the proper frame of mind to catch a serial killer, it was that place. Just entering the password I'd lifted from Catherine's notes creeped me out: *Leather Apron*.



I eased into that WELL like a wary guerilla in an Asian swamp. I moved slowly, as if ready for things to float by a little too close, as if knowing I wouldn't be able to react quickly enough, because of the weighty syrup of the air itself. I was listening for small sounds that signaled

something was out of place. I was sniffing for something foul in air already pungent. There was the feeling of being watched from the trees, of being out in the open; I was staring hard at every shadow, of which there were many in that dark place, that museum to a psycho-killer. There's something deeply unsettling about a room without walls—the furnishings sit there as if everything's as it should be, and you're the one who's crazy.

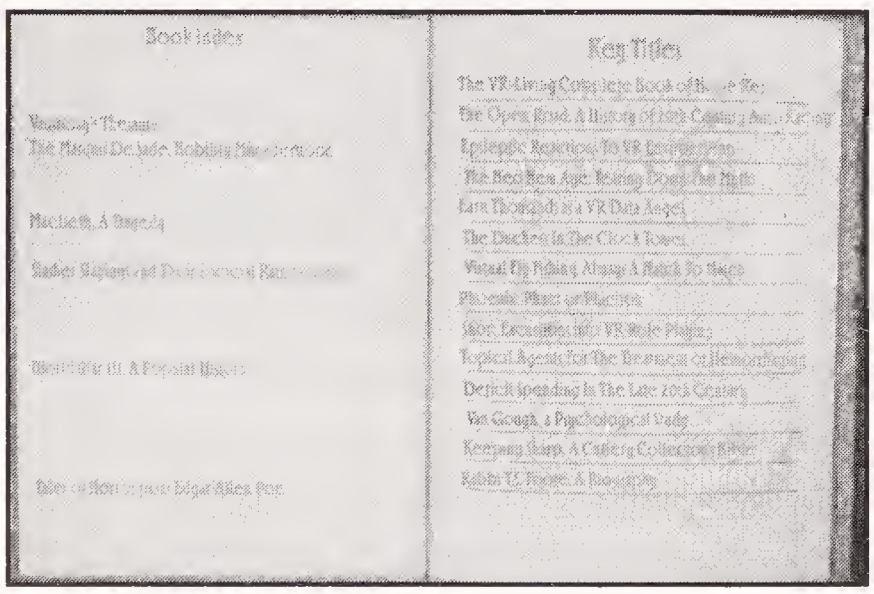
And if you're not, then what are you doing there? I didn't need to be. The Ripper needed me, because he thrived on the publicity as much as his blood-lust. He'd leave me alone if I did no more. If I went further, and got too close, he'd surely kill me, just as he had hapless Vic Farley. And yet I waded on, crazy with desire to catch him, like a sick man pursuing a love affair. I had to have him. And it was as if Falconetti understood that, as if he took it seriously. I appreciated that in him. He was what he was, which might have been evil, but it wasn't meaningless.

Was Falconetti the killer? At that moment, I thought he was, but I could have been wrong. All I knew was that even when he smiled, his smiles were wan, knowing ... regretful. He seemed to register that we were all facing something big and unknowable and evil. Something we had to respond to, either way. Magnotta took it seriously, too, with a burning anger that consumed him, but which he made no attempt to hide. And Burton, mirthless Burton, killed creatures to understand, and didn't do it lightly, but still held herself aloof ... as did they all. As did I. It wasn't as simple as egomania; it was the sadness of knowing that you saw something others didn't seem to understand.

So I moved stealthily, flicking past the notes on the side desk, past the lectern with the journal, past the coat rack with the cloak, past the breakfront of blades, all of it throbbing. What I found was another lectern, another journal, another puzzle—sick jokes, this time, just like the original Ripper's

matching book titles with the first Jack's smarmy prose; read a sentence about clipping the ears off victims, and match it to a book about Van Gogh. The inventor of this childish drivel had no idea, no idea at all, what horror he'd created, and that's why he was dangerous. All that mattered was that he was amused. He saw nothing outside himself. And so that was the way I had to be, too; that was what I had to become.

I was out of control now, ignorant of all else but the desire to win. I finished that puzzle and got my reward—a disk.



I downloaded it into my system without even looking at it. Because I was in the real game now, back in the hunt. I had to play. I had to take it, whatever it was, and learn something of the killer's mind from it, and stand ready for whatever it brought me.

But at least I had a weapon. I was wired, I was wary, I was well armed; I was on equal footing with a killer. So be it.

Chapter 36

WHY I NEVER LIKED CODERS

THE visions started coming hot and heavy after I got out of cyberspace. Or maybe it was as I was actually in the process of exiting, because that's what it seemed like—as if I were gliding through the strange netherworld between c-space and reality. I was tumbling in weightless free fall through a cyber-kinetic plane where I passed all the data I'd gathered on the case. It was morphing and cloaking, expanding and contracting, receding from the place where data was hard but not yet reaching the place where knowledge was soft—reality. I saw all the things I'd either witnessed or imagined, but the voices echoed, they were indistinct; faces morphing through shadows into other faces. Angels passing in the virtual night and giving you glimpses of their identities, the way I'd seen Falconetti's skull when I was in his circus: As if by X-ray vision. Falconetti became Magnotta, who became Burton, who shimmered into Catherine. It's hard to explain. It wasn't realistic, yet it seemed real, like imagination, like thought.

My mind was shifting through all the possibilities, it seemed, checking to see if I really knew what I knew. I seemed to be riffing through all the possible scenarios: I envisioned each of the suspects in a foggy place with canes wearing capes and top hats, looking the way I imagined the Ripper looked.

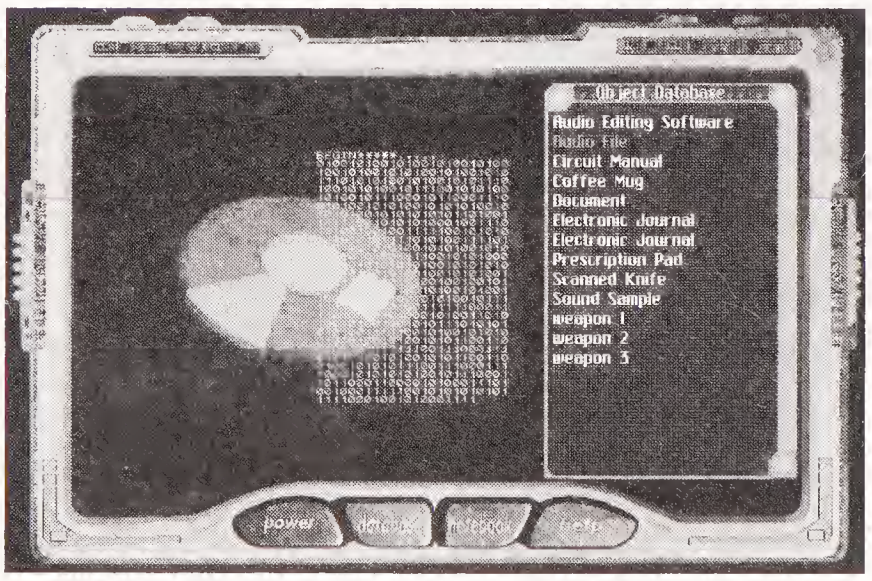
I landed with a thud back at my desk, rubbing my forearms hard, trying to remove the chill.

It was clear to me that I was in my own reality now, but I wasn't in control. Or at least, it wasn't a part of me that I knew about. I was beginning to wonder if the Ripper had corrupted me somehow, screwed with my nervous system or my memory wiring, as if slipping me a virtual drug. Who knew what he could do? The guy coded people's bodies so they would blow up. He controlled when, he controlled how. He did this to people when they were in cyberspace. I'd been in cyberspace a hell of a lot lately. I could practically hear my internal wiring popping and crackling. Was I shorting out? Would I know if I were?

It made me think of Vic Farley. I saw his face again, in the instant before he exploded. Had he known that the Ripper had gotten inside him? Would I know, if the Ripper had been at work inside me?

Patting my pockets as if to make sure I was all there, I found my WAC and yanked it out. I powered up the database and saw the weapon, all three pieces. At least I had that to protect myself now. But it was only going to protect me if I actually came into direct confrontation with the Ripper. The man could operate by remote control if he wanted to. What I needed was something like a suit of armor. I had the offense. Now I needed the defense. I thought I had an idea of where to get it, though.

Then I noticed the file I'd gotten in Falconetti's WELL. It was an audio file. I plugged in my earphones and clicked on the icon. The sound file hissed as it whirred to old-fashioned life, filling my head; then the game master marked the recording.



It was Falconetti himself, but with a higher-pitched voice; as he spoke I realized that this was a younger Falconetti, much younger; I listened to him as he

stamped the date and the time, and introduced the audio file from the last time the Web Runners had played *Ripper*.

As the game began, I could only imagine what the graphics had looked like—blocky, pixilated—but the sound file was as smooth as a velvet fog. The players' voices were transmogrified into perfect cockney. There was no mistaking a tart, no mistaking a lout, nor the bobbies struggling to sound official through that guttural accent. Nor was there any mistaking the one voice that was unchanged over the years—the Ripper's. I felt myself wilt into powerlessness as I heard him approach one of the prostitutes, one who'd just been bewailing to a colleague the cold and her lack of money. She'd known about the danger, but had no choice except to ply her trade, and it broke my heart when she greeted him as a "gentleman" and happily offered a "toss."

I saw my hands go white-knuckled on the edge of my desk as I listened to what happened next. *In my mind, I flashed through still shots of Stein and Jordan, Mendler and Estevez … was this what it had been like for them? Had they seen him in cyberspace, talked to him, heard him laugh?* Afterward, the sound of desperately scrambling, confused voices swelled to bursting in my earphones, shouting in the relentlessly coded accents. "What happened?" "What in hell is going on?" "She's flat-lined! She's flat-lined! She's flat-lined!"

I had my hands on the headphones. I'd heard enough. Then I paused a moment longer—

In the background, the coarsest accent of them all lost its bravado. "It was Josie, we switched—it was supposed to be me—" it said. "Who're you?" another voice barked. "Clare," came the response.

I pulled off my headphones.

I left.

I was at Soap Beatty's before my stomach had quit clenching.

He put up a hand and used the other to roll backwards when I

walked in. The news that I was with Vic at the end seemed to lead everyone to the same bloody conclusion.

"Whoa, Quinlan," he said. "My chest is about all I got left—"

"If I were the Ripper and wanted you dead, you'd be dead," I told him. "Now shut up and listen: Farley said the Ripper kills from cyberspace."

Soap looked at me, then looked at me harder.

I went on.

"He found some trace of inorganic code in the victims, something about changing the body's internal pressure. He said these people weren't cut, they were blown up."

An eyebrow peaked over one eye. He spoke slowly. "It's possible in theory … ."

"Except Farley wasn't decked in when he—"

"No," Soap said. He was rubbing his chin now, talking as if thinking out loud. "No, that's not the hard part. You wouldn't need to be jacked in if the code was on a timer … ."

"So how come everybody else was decked in when they bought it?"

"Because the killer hadn't perfected his delivery system yet? He shrugged. I mean, I would imagine that at the start, he had to be there, angel to angel, to implant the code. But that would mean you'd see him. Now … "

It sank in immediately. The Ripper had honed his skill. He'd probably been working on it ever since he killed Josie Dorsett fifteen years ago. Then, he had to be there, Soap was right about that—the audio tape proved he was there. Now, he didn't have to be there; he'd found a way to deliver his killer code without

being detected, and he could set it off by a timer. It was nearly the perfect crime—like simply *wishing* someone dead. All it took was for the victim to visit cyberspace.

Which meant that I could have it in me. My weapon would be useless.

And the thing that really freaked me out was that I'd practically known this—it was almost exactly what I'd speculated on earlier, when I'd wondered if he'd done something to me in c-space that was screwing me up later in the real world.

"But—" I started, formulating a thought, "but if he didn't want you to see him—I mean, why the messages to me? And why is it the same every time? I mean, how come the feet don't explode or something? You always know it's him."

"Oh, I didn't say he doesn't want you to know it's him. That torso business is just his signature. He's copying the original Ripper, who always cut people open that way, I think, emptied out their chest cavities. But copycats always think they're originals. And he's a hound for publicity, you're right. No, he keeps improving the technique 'cause the sorry-ass bastard thinks he's an artist."

It all made sense. Sick, perverted sense. I didn't know what to say.

Soap was lost in thought himself. Then he seemed to have an inspiration. He rolled over to a memo pad on the counter and wrote something down.

"Here," he said.

"What's this?"

"It's an address. I figure you're going back in there, right?"

What could I say?

"It's foolish, but I know you will," he went on. "But go to this guy first. That's his WELL. I don't know who he is, but in c-

space he calls himself Maximum Cain. If anybody can help you, he can. This stuff is way out of my league." He snorted and shook his head. "Hell, it's way out of anybody's league."

We were both silent for a moment after that. I *had* to go back in. Soap knew it, too.

"Maybe the Ripper's like a force of nature or something," he finally muttered. "Nothing you can do about it, it's gonna happen or it ain't."

I regained a sense of determination. "You could get a raincoat," I said.

Soap gave a weak smile. "Why I try swapping metaphors with a writer is beyond me," he said.

I looked at him and his grin was tight in the corners.

I tried to smile back. Then I left.

Chapter 37

ARTISTS SUCK, TOO

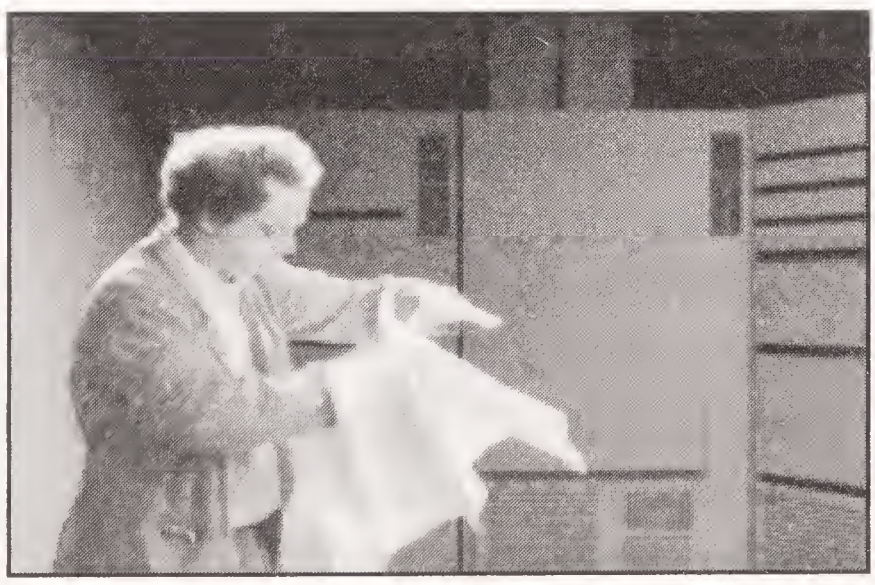
THE weird news from Soap—the awful news, really—resonated with some equally weird news that came from Dr. Bud Cable when I got to the Meta-Cog. I'd gone there to deck into Catherine's mind one more time. I thought I should do that before I went back into cyberspace to find Maximum Cain, both because I had some more info to lay on her, and because there was a possibility that I might not come back. At least it was safe to deck into Catherine; her mind was on a closed system.

Which is what made Cable's news so odd—he'd been getting some very strange readings from her brain scans. It seemed that there had been some inexplicable bursts of electrical activity going on inside Catherine's sweet noggin—but only on days when the Ripper had struck.

"See for yourself," he said when I scoffed.

"But how could that be? She's on a closed system."

"I'm just telling you what the machinery's telling me," he said.



He flicked through the dates on his monitor, and there was no missing it; I knew those dates too well—they'd been some of the most important filing deadlines of my career—and could see the straight line turned into a profile of the Himalayas on the dates of each

and every one of the Ripper killings since Catherine's incapacitation.

"Could the system have leaks?" I pressed.

"I doubt it," Cable said. But then he shrugged. "We're not the Pentagon or anything, but security's pretty good here."

I held back from telling him I'd been able to sneak around the place with ease; if their computer security was half as lax, Catherine could get up and go out for a hoagie, for all they'd know. If she weren't in a coma, that is.

I rubbed my forehead, trying to think what this could mean. Had the Ripper decked into Catherine to leave a little something for me? But the dates of most of the attacks preceded the last time I'd been in her consciousness. If he'd left something for me, I already had it ... which could explain why I had been feeling so strange lately, but I cut off that line of thought. What was done was done. I was either a carrier of the Ripper's deadly killer virus, or I wasn't. There was no antidote.

But I couldn't shut it off so easily. I felt a flashing charge of energy shoot through me, like a monitor crackling. I shuddered,

glancing at Cable. He was absorbed in his printouts, scratching his head.

I wagged my head like a dog that had gotten a snort of something bad, then pulled out the picture Magnotta had given me. "Tell me what you think of this," I said.

Cable looked up, saw the picture, became intrigued. I explained what it was supposed to be.

He looked more closely. He looked impressed.

"Well, there *were* some policemen decked into her the other day, but I didn't think they got anything out of her," he said. "Still, it certainly looks authentic."

He held the picture out towards me. I reached to take it back, and felt another weird shiver jolt through me.

Falconetti was laughing, passing me a photograph just like the one Magnotta had given me, except—

It was over in an instant. I looked at the picture. *It was of Magnotta as the Ripper.* I blinked. No—the picture was still of Falconetti.

"Are you all right?" Cable was asking me.

"I'm fine," I told him, although I felt as if I'd stood up too quickly. "I've got to talk to Catherine."

"You look a little pale."

"I'm fine. I've got some more news for her that might help with the picture on your monitor. That's the only image I'm going to trust for now."

I rushed, as if to get away from the contents of my own head.

But even as I donned the decking visors, I was wrapped up in those flashes. What the hell was going on? Was there a chance that it had nothing to do with the Ripper, that he wasn't—somehow—toying with me? Was I giving him too much credit, granting him too many powers? What if it was my own brain doing these things, telling me to be careful, to keep asking "What if?" It was like I'd gotten a warning: Don't trust the pictures. Or, more accurately, don't trust the people making them. But I only had one picture—why was I speaking in the plural? And then it became clear: because it might just as well have been more. Falconetti, Magnotta—even Burton—giving me a fake picture was something

any one of them could have done, would have done.

And I knew instantly that this was true—if you knew how, if you were a photo artist, you could make a picture of anything you wanted. And what better term for my three suspects than artist—*con* artist? Except, of course, for the one who should have been called *murderer*?

It was simple logic. As I adjusted my visors, then reached for the activation button on the decking port, I was thinking, What if what was going on was some deep-seated intuition or premonition trying to break through to me? My mother always said I had a wild imagination.

I jabbed at the button, slammed back in my chair, and felt the rush of entry. And as I slipped away, I wondered about the Ripper, the person Soap had referred to as an artist; I wondered what the Ripper's mother used to tell him. Probably something like, "Put the legs back on that cat."

Chapter 38

I TAKE REJECTION BADLY

CATHERINE was actually sitting up when I got to her little oasis, and I realized with a start that my visits to her were indeed having some effect. She was still a zombie, moaning and muttering, but she had made some progress. I tried to appreciate this, even as my own inner sense of desperation was gaining momentum. I was getting closer to the Ripper than even Catherine had been, and I knew that if I finally broke through to her, and got *her* to tell *me* something, I'd be walking around like a man with a time-bomb embedded in his skull from here on out.

I tried to tell myself to slow down, but the questions had backed up in my mind as if I were the Hoover Dam.

"All right, things are getting really complicated here," I told her. I was pacing back and forth; her eyes remained riveted on the emptiness before them. "I mean, I know I've got most of the pieces—it all started fifteen years ago, when Magnotta and Burton and Falconetti were in the Web Runners, and they played this role-playing game based on Jack the Ripper, right? And they're playing this game, and somebody gets killed for real—"

I shot a glance at her and saw her lips moving ever so slightly, but nothing was coming out.

"The Ripper did that. It was the first of his murders."

Her eyes registered nothing.

"But you knew that, didn't you?"

I was staring hard at her now, and it seemed to me her lips were working a bit more; but only faint moans and broken gasps escaped her.

I pressed. "Didn't you, Catherine?"

"I—I—"

She was going to respond, I just knew it. But what question was going to break the ice? Then I thought of it: Her strongest memory would be of the attack itself; I went with that.

Still, she only moaned incoherently ... but then a few words slipped out: "book," "library"; I even got a polysyllabic: "anonymous tip" ... but I couldn't make sense out of it.

Then I figured I should try something about the most likely suspect, which would have been the last person she saw. Another angle at the same question. But which suspect should I go with? I'd come in certain that Falconetti was the killer, but then the little spell back in the ICU had caused me to question myself.

I held back, afraid to give her the wrong suspect. I went on with the history review instead. Maybe she'd give me some clue about who had attacked her.

"The person who got killed, Catherine, her name was Josie Dorsett—"

She shrieked.

"What is it? What, Catherine?"

"Hat, cobble stones—fog ... I see—no ... no ... no ... ." I'd brought her too close, too much fear was coming back to her.

"Are you afraid that he's still after you, Catherine?" I asked, as gently as I could. "Don't be. He's—"

"No," she practically wailed, "no! Don't want to end up like Farley!"

"Like Farley? Wait a minute—how do you know about Farley? That was after you were attacked."

Her face seemed to close up; at least I knew she was listening to me. But something was wrong.

"How did you know about Farley?" I pressed harder.

She resumed moaning. "Jake … Jake said … ."

I drew back, feeling the hard stare on my face. I was sure I hadn't told her. But then—how else would she know?

"No—knife—no!"

I put it aside for now; she seemed on the verge of hysteria.

"It's all right, Catherine," I told her, stroking her hair. "You're safe here. He does it in cyberspace, and I found out about a secret lab Burton has in an old abandoned subway car beneath the Meta-Cog—did you know about that? She's conducting tests there, tests where she kills animals *through cyberspace*."

"Secret lab?"

It was clear as a bell; a complete sentence. Then there was more info.

"PanFinancial … George Rhodes … no, can't remember."

"Please, Catherine—try. There's so little time now."

"Working with Burton—big story, put me on the map. But—" She was getting clearer and clearer, but then she'd stumble. "Not sure if she's giving me all the facts." She moaned.

She had me confused. "What big story? What could be bigger than the Ripper?" She just muttered. The frustration was building up in me. I was losing track of the interview, like a cub reporter getting his first "no comment." I tried to pick up the thread again. I went back to the name that had made her scream.

"Who was Josie Dorsett, Catherine?"

She became absolutely tortured then, hunching her shoulders, her eyebrows knitting together as something welled up in her.

"They killed her ... they killed her."

"Who was she, Catherine?"

"She—she was my—mother."

I was dumbfounded.

"What? But her name—"

She was reviving now, her speech returning to near normal.

"Powell was her maiden name ... ." She turned on me—or rather toward me, like she was talking to her memory of me, not the actual me standing there like a guy who'd been pole-axed. "Why did you make me remember—she's dead! She's dead, Jake!"

I felt awful, but also confused as hell.

"Catherine, I'm sorry. But why didn't you tell me? And why didn't you tell me you were so close to the Ripper?"

And this was where her diction finally clarified itself completely, and it seemed to do so with a faint but detectable smirk.

"I wanted to scoop the great Jake Quinlan," she said, with a devastating clarity.

"You were out to steal my story?" I was stunned. "But why? Ben would have given you your own byline next time."

"This was the story of the century, and I wanted it," she said, her voice settling into a flat, cold version of her normal tone; it was as if the rancor was what brought it back and made it steady. These were strong memories. "The *Times* was going to give it to me."

I was reeling now, like I'd received punch after punch—which I had.

It was my turn to talk like I'd been lobotomized.

"I can't—I can't believe this! You were gonna take *my* story to the *Times*? What the hell? I thought—I thought we had something! Catherine: Didn't you love me at all?"

She turned, and this time, I knew, she saw me. "You're a nice guy, Jake. But I wanted your job, not your family."

Chapter 38

She kept looking at me, that faint smirk licking the corner of her lip.

I backed away, then I backed away further. Then I ran. And the thing about running in cyberspace is you can really *run*—you can run right off cliffs, and soar through all your demons, screaming at you, laughing at you, and keep going, and never hit the ground.

But I did hit the ground. And when I pulled off my decking helmet, Bud Cable told me I must have done a hell of a job in there, because the image of the Ripper flickering on his monitor had improved drastically.

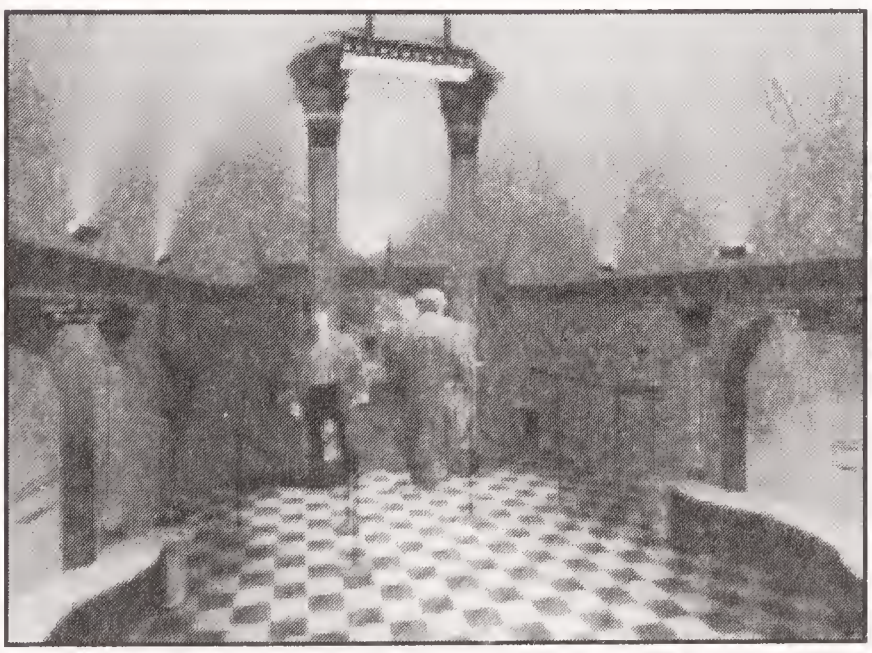
I think they call this a kick in the pants. They just never tell you what side of the pants gets the kick.

Chapter 39

HOT-BLOODED WOMAN, COLD-BLOODED KILLER?

AND I thought things had been bleak before. When I left the Meta-Cog, I was ready to drop kick a puppy. I was totally free now, detached from everything I knew, and I went about my business with a remorselessness that knew no bounds. The normal melodramatic role-playing that some of us can't help but assume whenst lied to and jilted meshed seamlessly with the bone-rattling feeling that had been growing in me anyway. Give a grave digger bad news, he just digs a little more relentlessly, that's all.

I went after George Rhodes at the PanFinancial Bank first. This is the name Catherine had dropped when she was mumbling about supposedly collaborating with Clare Burton on a "big story." My initial response still rang true on that one—what story could be bigger than the Ripper? I didn't have to wait for my psychic self to give me any flash messages this time—the lesson was not to discount Burton as a suspect. Whatever her "story" was, it was a safe



bet that it had something to do with the case. Better, maybe, to discount Catherine herself, like when she said she wasn't sure Burton was giving her all the facts. Imagine, Catherine being in a huff because someone wasn't giving her all the facts. And I suppose John Wilkes Booth had a right to complain to Mrs. Lincoln about the fact that her husband had keeled over too quickly to allow for a second shot?

In any case, if there was some big story there, it was mine now. I was going to use everything that Catherine had given me, and run it hard. There were no rules anymore.

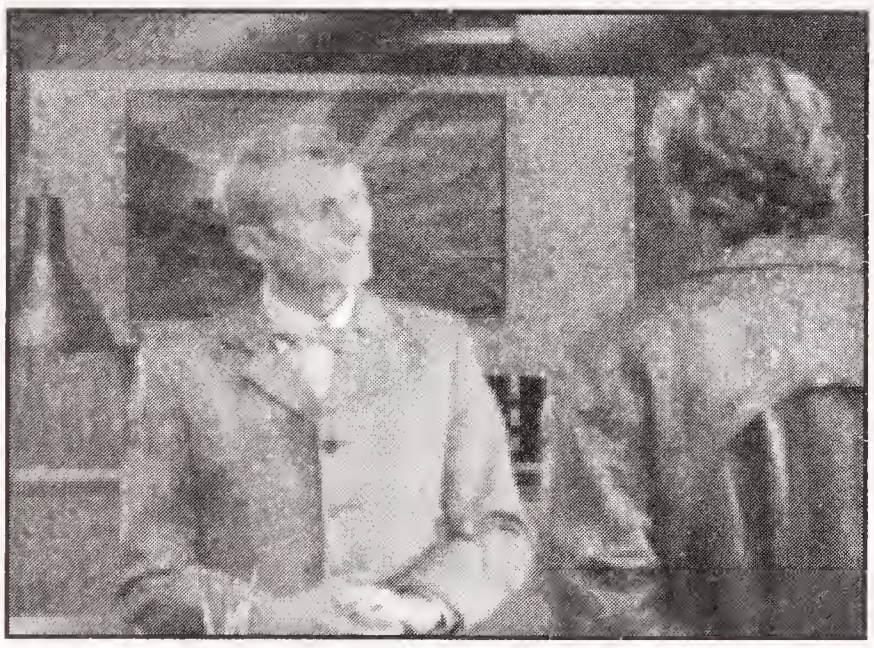
Not that I gave a damn about bylines anymore anyway. True, I'd already decided that I wasn't going to eat or sleep until I'd run down every lead I had, questioned every possible source, uncovered every hidden fact and innuendo. But that wasn't for the sake of any *story*. This had gone way beyond story. This had even gone beyond the technique known in the newsroom as "poke and provoke"—when you interview everyone in a politician's life just to piss him off and see if he'll do something embarrassing in public. You know, where you interview his sweet old mother and ask her if her son's been any different since he stopped having sex with animals. No, we were in far meaner country than that. I was involved in what I hoped would turn out to be poke, provoke, and kill.

So George Rhodes must have known he was in trouble when he saw me coming. He was a classic bean counter, tall and skinny and pale as hell, the kind of company man who has two suits: one gray and the other gray. I could tell he'd never been ridden hard and put away wet. But he was about to be.

He gulped conspicuously when I strode up to his counter and told him Catherine Powell sent me.

"She's dead," he said.

"Nah," I told him. "She's just over at the Meta-Cog doing a great



impersonation. I'm her partner."

"She never told me she had a partner." He was whispering, shooting nervous glances all over the place, even to the vaulted ceiling high above us, as if the cherubs there would descend and rescue him.

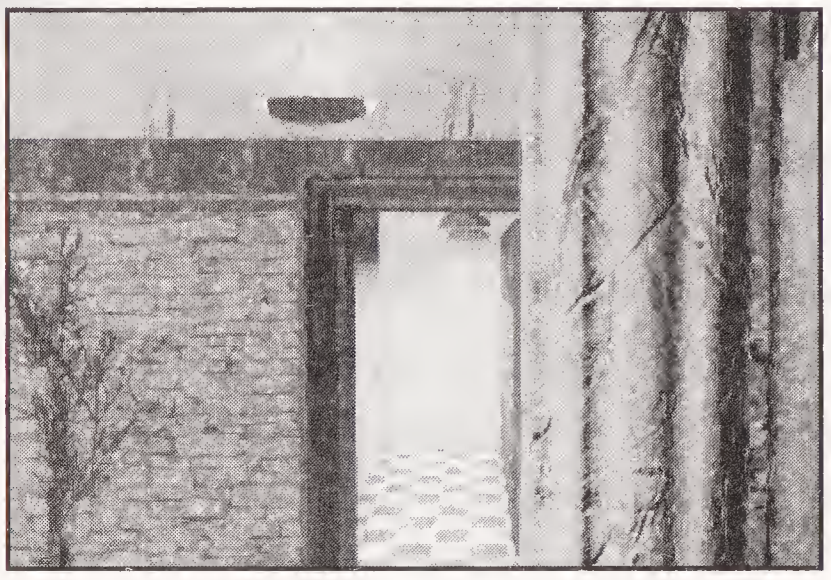
"I'm one of those silent partners you hear so much about," I told him.

"Then you shouldn't be talking," he hissed back. Touché—I hadn't expected the guy to have a flair for repartee. "Especially to me—I put everything in box 759, just like she told me."

I was grinning when I leaned forward on the counter. It had been too easy already. "Now give me the combination," I told him.

His eyes narrowed, then went wide in alarm. "Who *are* you?" he asked, starting to panic. He was backing away from the counter. "If you're really with Powell, you'd know the combination. Who are you?" But he didn't wait for an answer. He ran, scooting off through the loan desks to disappear in a distant men's room. I chuckled. As if I wouldn't follow him in there if I had to. Catherine must have played him like a violin, I thought.

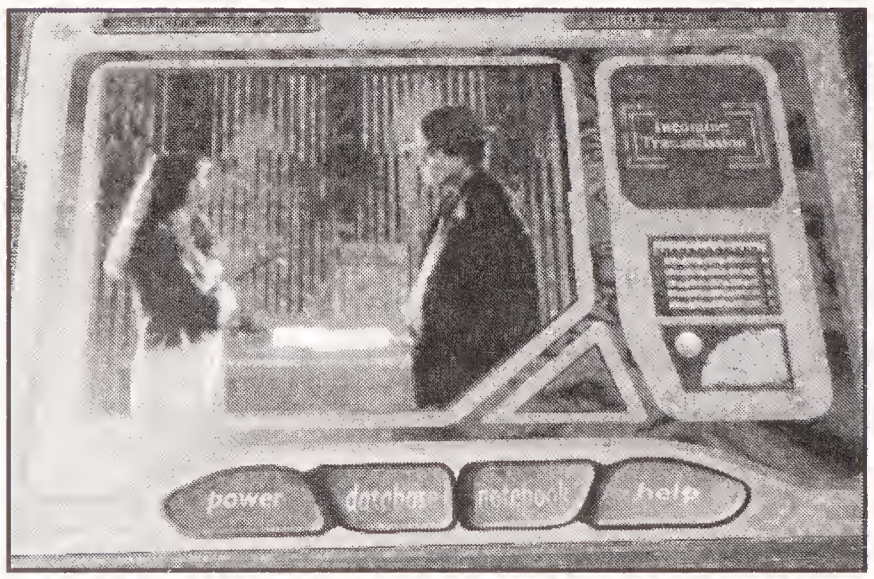
I let him go. He was just a stooge, the kind of guy who, in a movie, always tells the bad guys, "But I don't know anything!" except they never believe him and they beat the crap out of him. I believed him.



Besides, I had an idea I knew what the combination was anyway. I headed into the safe-deposit vault and found box number 759, reaching into my jacket for my WAC as I did so. And I knew what happened next was strange even as it happened, but I didn't so much as bat an eye: The WAC signaled an incoming message just as I withdrew it from my pocket. It was as if I'd known it would happen.

It turned out to be a surveillance transmission from one of the bugs I'd planted. I hit the receiver and the image crackled into focus on Vince Magnotta's office, and the sound fizzled into clarity on Clare Burton's voice. She was delivering something to Magnotta, while he was asking her what the hell she was doing there. She told him she was dropping off her surveillance report because she didn't want him coming around the Meta-Cog anymore. She told him it was her surveillance report on me.

I think I actually smiled at this. I'd suspected all along that Magnotta was watching me. Interesting to learn that Burton was in cahoots with him—it seemed she reported on all my activities at the hospital. But Magnotta had slipped up—he should have been watching me *all* the time. Because then he'd know that now *I* was watching him.

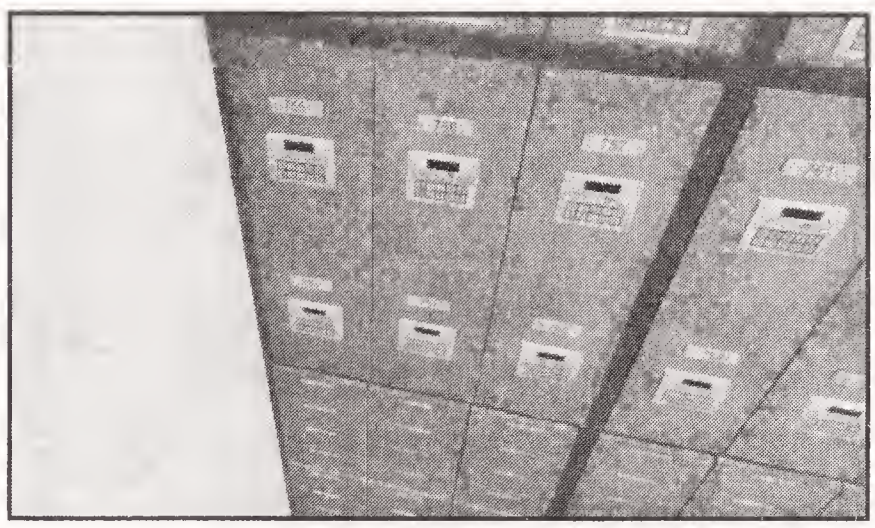


Burton had slipped up, too. Because she'd trusted Catherine, given her whatever I was about to uncover. But trusting Catherine was a

mistake a lot of us had made. She probably never expected to be given up by someone in a coma, either.

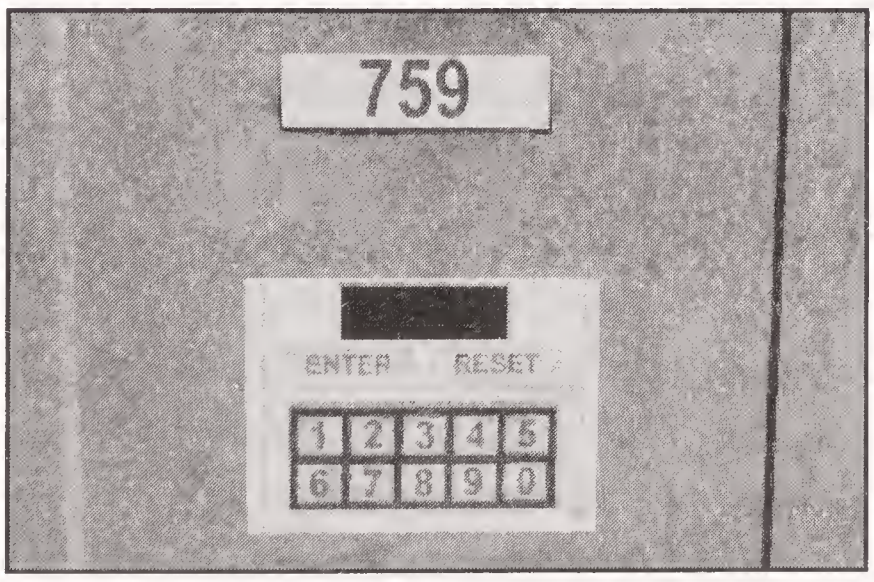
The scene in Magnotta's office had deteriorated into a shouting match of threats and accusations. "I'm going to tell Quinlan what you're up to," Burton said.

"Too late," I replied out loud, and I switched off the transmission. I went into my database and summoned up the notes I'd taken from Catherine's Rolodex. After all the perambulations she'd put me through to uncover her various code words—after all the crystals and book-safes and tricks with calculators—she'd gotten careless on one; I remembered her entry on George Rhodes precisely because it had included a number that wasn't the same length as a phone number.



I punched in 185621. The deposit box slid open. Things were starting to go my way.

Inside the box I found an electronic ledger with a single accounting sheet in it; it was a list of transactions between a company called Berman, Inc., and Simian Technologies. Jesus, Burton, I thought. Is that the best you could come up with? *Simian Technologies?* As if I wouldn't connect that to the *monkeys* you were juicing in your subway car lab?



Berman, Inc. was giving Simian Tech some very large sums of money. Berman, Inc.

had a WELL. Quinlan, Jake, had its password.

I scanned the document into my database and put everything back where I'd found it.

Things were falling into place. I was on a paper chase now. And nobody beats a reporter at a paper chase.

I hit the streets, looking for a cab. Things were happening fast. People were making mistakes. Especially Catherine. Because she'd told me the biggest lie of them all.

Then I stopped dead in my tracks. I was having another one of my visions, except I was completely aware of what was going on. I wasn't out of control at all, wasn't shivering, or seeing tracers on the periphery. I envisioned myself, back in Catherine's consciousness, saw her telling me what I suddenly knew was another lie: I suddenly knew, for sure, that I hadn't told her about Vic Farley. She was in contact, somehow, with the Ripper. She was still holding out on me, and she didn't give a damn if it put me in danger.

And I realized, with a tingling along the back of my neck, that this was an even bigger lie than the one that had left my poor ego wounded as hell. Because this was a lie that could get me killed.

I had to move fast. Real fast.

Chapter 40

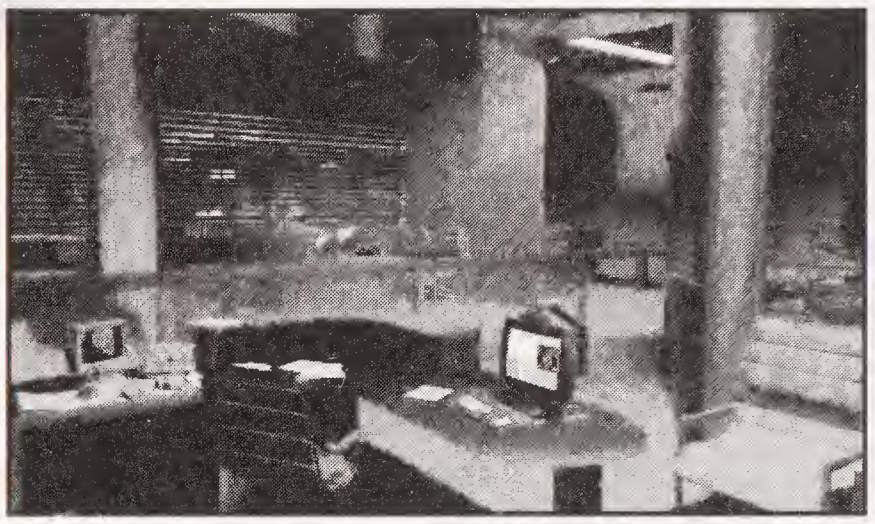
VENDETTA REGATTA

ONCE I decided I hated the woman I had loved the day before, things began to snap into focus. Funny how that works. I realized that the fact that Josie Dorsett was Catherine's mother was something of prime importance. So was the fact that Catherine was more up to date on current events than your average coma victim. So was the fact that she may have been linked to someone who was killing monkeys via cyberspace.

What I had to find out now was who was actually profiting from that—who controlled the Berman account, Catherine or Clare Burton? The ledger was in Catherine's box, but it wasn't clear if it was hers or if she'd stolen it from Burton. Clarifying this was crucial, because one thing was certain: Berman wasn't paying to find out how to kill monkeys. Which meant that assuming the Ripper was just a psychotic sociopath might have been a mistake. A fatal mistake. The killings, I saw, might have been a sick upgrade of animal testing—the work of someone just trying to get a product out. It was possible that the person I was after was a flaming capitalist.

It was like a Zen koan: Which is more dangerous, a sociopathic serial killer or a businessman with a product hard-on?

I left it to philosophers. Whatever Catherine was up to—and I was certain she was involved somehow—logic told me Burton, not the lovesick men in her life, was now the prime suspect, as everything revolved around her technology. But God knows I now had motives galore, gathering together like so many sails on the



horizon: Romantic triangles, murdered mothers, huge amounts of money—which one was it? Vendettas were everywhere.

I was completely jacked up as I made my way to the newsroom and my decking port. I was convinced I'd caught a wind that was going to help me catch up to those sails, to bank through the water and the spray and the sharks and the dive-bombing gulls until I caught up to the leader of the pack. My eyes were roving, my senses tingling, my hands fisted and ready to dart into my jacket for my revolver at the slightest stray noise. It was like my jangly-vision mode had been switched on full-time. Distorted voices echoed around me, skulls were visible beneath skin; anyone could be the Ripper. One false move, one jab of electric intuition, and I'd shoot first and ask questions later. I was getting close now, and I knew it, and I knew the Ripper knew it, too.

And it was going to happen in cyberspace. I was as sure of that as I could possibly be.

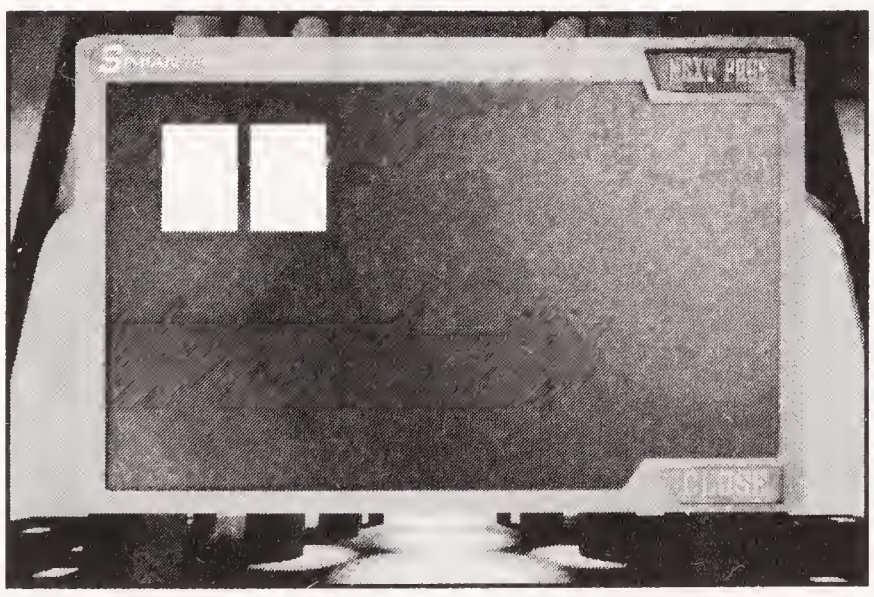
I checked my virtual weapon before decking in; the pieces were still there, all three of them, ready to load into one at the slightest summoning. I'd have a chance—a fighting chance—if I encountered the Ripper before I could get the shielding from Maximum Cain. I knew I should get it as fast as I could, but I had one stop I simply had to make first. See, I had a kind of a vendetta now, myself: against Catherine. It was more than just bitterness against a woman who'd done me wrong; it was the electric anger caused by the realization that someone I'd slept with, someone I'd loved, could have left me open to a killer. I had to settle that one first.

Chapter 40

I slammed back in my leather chair, then felt it vaporize beneath me; I was on my way.

At the Berman WELL, I raced through a tile puzzle, maniacally focused on bulling through the silliness. It was a concentration puzzle, I realized immediately, and concentration was one thing I had in spades at that point. I *felt* the solution more than saw it, shucked off as irrelevant the fact that the tiles were antique UPC symbols that hadn't been used for thirty years; the pattern was somehow crystal clear to me. I flipped the first tile in the first row, the first tile in the third row, then the third tile in the last row. I was in.

Another electronic ledger awaited me. Again, the only thing in it was—mysteriously—the only thing I needed, and I didn't stop to wonder why, because I knew it didn't matter. I opened the first document, found a detail of the document I'd found in the safe-deposit box; it revealed that the transactions had, indeed, paid for Burton's testing. Each one was flagged for milestones like "organ failure," and "terminal images," and "moment of death." There were signatures at the bottom, the names of Simian's corporate officers; I stared at them hard. They all looked ... similar. I scanned the document into my database, filing it away for a handwriting analyst I just happened to know.



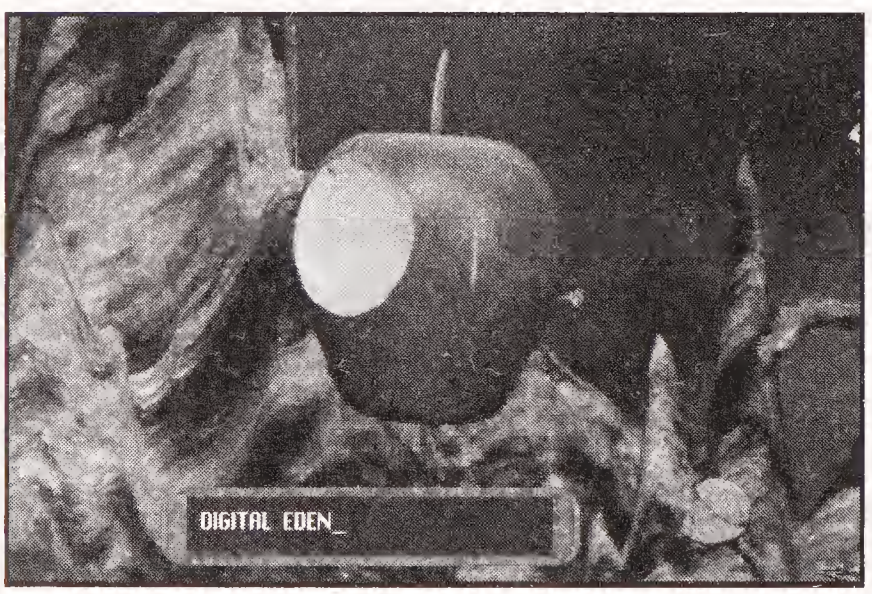
The second document revealed nothing. My angel hovered

there, surprised. I read it again. It just said that Berman controlled the account, and employees should keep its contents top secret. Then the characters morphed—shifted, throbbed, glowed brightly—then flashed back. My angel pulled back in alarm. My first vision in cyberspace—Christ, I thought, a vision inside a vision. An imagined reality within an imagined reality. I struggled for control, tried to recapture what I'd seen—it was a name, a name I knew, but had nearly forgotten: Vigo Haman. I still needed to track him down, back in reality, and find out why he'd sent someone to kill Covington Wofford. Did he control the Berman account? I realized my mind was just trying to tell me: *He could.*

Message received. Consider every possibility. Rely on intuition.

And get some protection.

I sailed away from Berman, headed for Maximum Cain, and found him, my angel descending, at Digital Eden. I floated into his WELL and he looked up at me, grinning.



Soap had told him I was coming.

"Well-l-l …" he began, looking me up and down, smirking and grinning and shaking his head like he was jazzed up on something, a fallen angel who didn't give a damn about damnation, his iconic self a sparkling metallic outfit that seemed to scoff at his outcast status. His WELL was full of applications taking the form of hardware, monitors, computers … . I was glad, thinking he could just give me what I needed. I was wrong about that. There was more to chase.

"Man, you need a sensor to alert you of any impending attacks, you need an anti-viral code to take out what the sensor

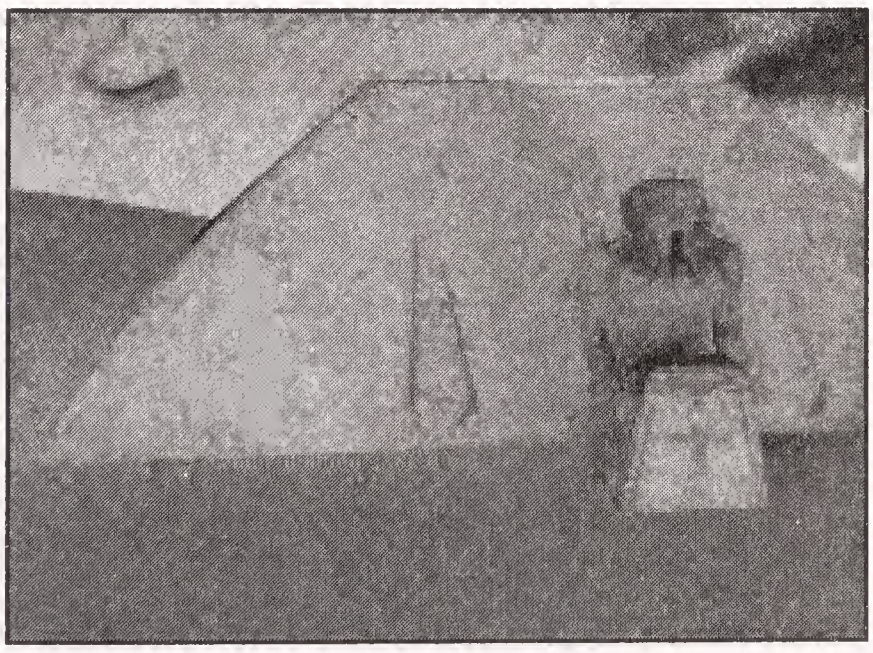
detects," he rattled off, his voice booming, "you need a compression program to stuff it all!" He seemed to enjoy it all even as it annoyed him, like he was being interrupted from something important, yet couldn't help but be amused by someone pursuing the Ripper. I was a rube to him, but an insistent rube.

"You got 'em?" I barked.

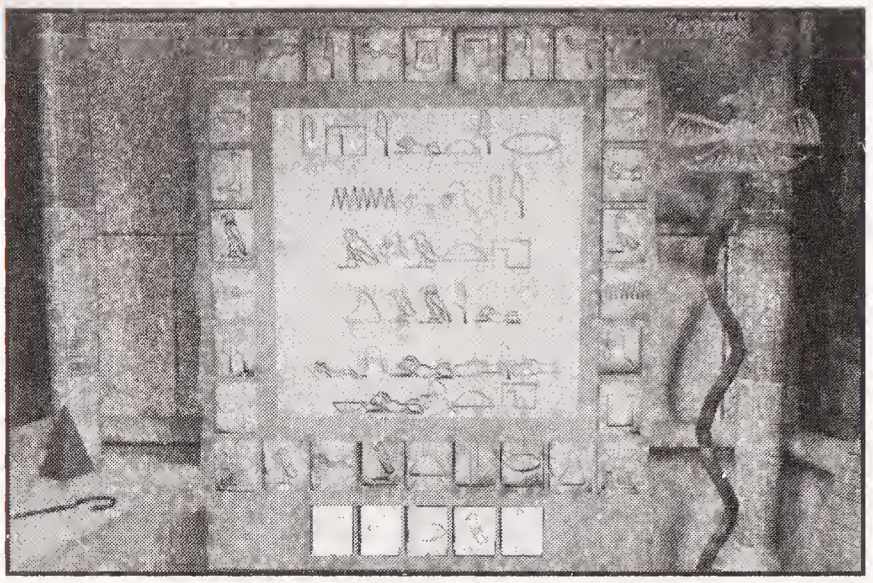
"Hey, what do I look like? Oh, man—" his arm suddenly extended and grabbed me; I felt the compression program entering my data angel. Then he said, "You're gonna have to go get the rest yourself, brother. I can tell you where to get the sensor, but I'm gonna have to hit the mall for an anti-viral utility. You prefer, I could just jam you behind some code so thick the dude will never find you."

But I insisted, and he gave me the location for the sensor code. I was going to have to come back for the anti-viral utility. I flew off in frustration, rushing, rushing.

I was jamming up under the pressure of time when I got into what Cain had called the "Isis WELL." It was some pseudo-Egyptian location with a talking Sphinx. I entered and then levitated before a stone panel of hieroglyphs, stumped; the voice of the Sphinx filled the room. "The vulture may be the beginning ..." I realized the panel had a border that was an alphabet; I took it that the clues were in the central panel.



It was like a word puzzle from there, and once I'd unjammed, I realized this was a lucky break for a reporter. The clues were odd words like "quail" and "noose." I found



symbols to match the glyphs, punched them into the border, and voila—sensor program.

I was swooping, now, my angel feeling watched by an evil god; Cain had found the anti-viral utility, but it was another WELL hunt. I got there as fast as I could, and found myself on a levitating platform of flipping death's heads —I had to dodge a virus, it seemed, to get a virus. I didn't dodge well—I stepped on a skull and crossbones and got booted out. I went back at it. Again, I was jamming, not thinking clearly. I got booted out again.

The third time was the charm; I'd learned from the mistakes, my head had cleared; I found the path across the platform. I had the third unit of protection.

I sailed out of cyberspace, empowered like Gabriel, ready for the final showdown.

All I had to do was arrange it in reality.

Chapter 41

I ROUND UP THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

I hit the ground running, frustrated that I couldn't fly like I could in cyberspace, but doing my best to move like a data angel anyway. In truth, it was like I was losing track of what state I was in—reality was morphing into a veering strangeness as unreliable as cyberspace; visions were shooting by, gripping me vise-like as if I were being electrocuted, then releasing me to startled wariness. The only true reality was the one inside me, the one where my heart was pounding like a kettle drum.

My first landing was at Soap Beatty's, where I found that the signatures on the Simian Tech ledger I'd found in the Berman WELL all belonged to Clare Burton.

Then it was off to the Duchamp, where Gambit Nelson told me I was in the wrong place—I should have visited something called the Warp Space WELL when I was in c-space. "They could tell you about that fatal game," he said. "They're a manufacturer, they have all the game histories registered. I mean, there were rumors that the problem with that game was just a programming glitch."

I didn't need a sidetrack just then, but there could be no stone left unturned. I decked in and decked out, discovering only that

someone going under the c-space handle "Clarence" had accessed the application the day before the killing game was played fifteen years before. My mind flickered at learning this—I recalled all the books about the original Ripper that I'd read, including one that had speculated that a low-level royal named the Duke of Clarence had been the Ripper.

With a muttered oath at the sky, I brought the name to the Meta-Cog, decked into Catherine, and laid it on her. There was no hair stroking this time. But her act was unchanged. Coldness did not register.

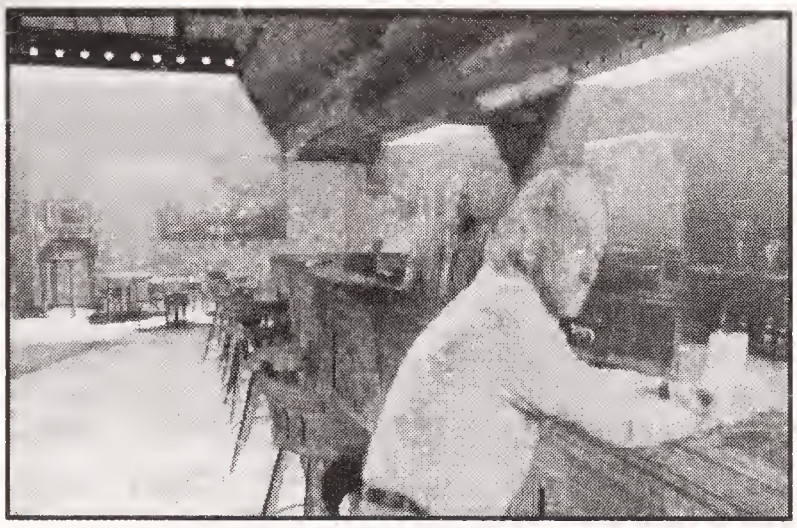
"Clarence?" she muttered, almost swooning. "I think that was … Magnotta … ."

Who knew if it was true? Who knew what she knew? She'd pointed her finger at everyone so far.

I was getting shaky, my trips in and out of reality like being in a place where there were only two elements but they were merging, like the horizon on the ocean; I was diving in and out of water and sky, losing the perception of which was which. But I gripped myself long enough to realize that I had one more stop before rounding up my suspects and pointing my own finger … a stop that, in a way, would provide the ultimate reality check.

Back at the Duchamp, he held court almost daily: I'd seen him and avoided him for years, because he was one of the most dangerous men in the city, and because he looked like a pasha of pain.

Vigo Haman, in his white suit and loafers and enormous girth, appeared to be a man content with life because he *controlled* it. He'd taken over all of the city's various c-space rackets years before, and had been impervious to investigation after investigation.



Accusations were leveled, grand juries convened; witnesses vanished or absorbed the rap—or showed up dead and in pieces. It all seemed to make him jolly. If you stayed off his turf, people said, he *was* jolly. He spread his largesse the way he probably spread the butter on his biscuits—thickly—and it only seemed to increase his power and security all the more. In fact, he was so secure that he hung out at the Duchamp seemingly alone, as if flaunting his near-mystical status, in his ever-present tropical attire appearing to control the climate as well. But I had no doubt that if you approached him with blood in your eye, a world of trouble would emerge from the floors and the ceilings and the walls, like a hundred evil genies released from ancient lamps, and engulf you before you were within eyesight. He was not a man to be reckoned with, he was a man to be avoided like death.

Like I said, I was having trouble with reality: I approached.

"Ahhh, Mr. Quinlan," he said pleasantly. "Won't you join me?" He wiped a massive arm across the table before him, sending the china that seedy bar reserved for him alone crashing about us. "We have much to discuss." Suffice it to say I sat.

He launched a long anecdote then, a tale he seemed to savor, about how I had once disrupted his business by uncovering one of his operators in a story. He launched another tangent, about how he still considered killing me for that, musing over his options aloud. Then he regaled me with the news that he

had Ben Dodds in his pocket, and how I therefore couldn't touch him. Then he offered me tea.

His tale about Ben had me shaken; I demurred. He'd told me Ben had a daughter, a daughter I hadn't known about, who'd been a reporter. She'd written a trumped-up story that had made a man commit suicide.

Haman laughed when I told him he was full of it. "What do you have in that teacup, anyway?" I asked him.

"For all intents and purposes," he said, "your ass, my boy."

I had to hold my head for a minute; I was hearing weird static, seeing double. Reality kept shifting on me.

"I'm only after the Ripper," I muttered. "Nothing else matters. Not even you."

In another state of consciousness—say, old-fashioned sobriety—I would have realized how foolish it was to demean this man. But in another state of consciousness, I wouldn't have gotten the surprising results.

"A revolting business, that," Haman concurred abruptly. I looked up from between my fingers. "All right, you're here about that little business with Jellyroll Wilson. A duplicitous contract from the start. I can only tell you if I'd known the real identity of the contractor, I would never have taken it."

I realized I was getting some answers here. I sat up, tried to remember how to be a reporter. "So ... who *did* contract you?"

"In cyberspace, a woman. In reality, who can say? Tea?"

"You already asked me that."

"So I did. You look like you need it."

I stared at him in hyper-wariness. He'd just been explaining how he was considering my untimely death.

My look registered on him. "It's a nasty business, one that does none of us any good. It … muddies the criminal waters, shall we say?"

He wanted the Ripper dead, too.

"You have only so much time, you know," he observed, tipping the teapot over his dainty cup.

I stood up quickly, my chair scraping the floor. It as if he already knew what would happen. My reaction amused him. He chuckled, then hoisted the teacup between two sausage-like fingers and toasted me. "I wish you all the luck," he said.

I took the cue, and backed away. All eyes were on me as I retreated from the bar—Gambit's, the bartender's, the other patrons'. It was as if everyone knew. Things seemed to be closing in on me, before I could close in on them. Haman was right—I was nearly out of time. It was now or never. It was time to point the finger.

In the cab on the way to the Meta-Cog, I discovered that even the cabbies seemed to be on the alert. I got one who spoke English, and who took me directly to where I was going. I lapsed, momentarily, into a shiver in the back seat, my mind flashing in throbbing but nearly indiscernible impulses through alternative scenarios: *In one, Haman was telling me he'd been working with Burton, that he controlled Berman, Inc., that Burton had been selling him death resonances from the monkeys she'd killed in cyberspace, concluding that she, therefore, was the Ripper; In another, there was no Haman, it was Magnotta—no, it was Falconetti, something about the menage a trois leading to an endless evil duel; then back to Magnotta, the same thing* … . And then it was all gone. I was in

a cab, and I was at the Meta-Cog, and the cabbie was smiling hopefully, turning and waiting for me to exit, telling me I'd arrived at my destination.

I got out nervously, carefully, and the door closed behind me with a sound that was very final. I was thinking I wasn't ready yet, I still needed more; I nearly backed down. I started for the entrance. Then I did back down. Something was gnawing at me, something not right; I was missing something.

I stumbled back to the newsroom and saw Ben Dodds. I told him about Haman.

His face became grim. He stared off out the window, looked at the city. He spoke to the glass. "Run the damn story," he said. He kept his back to me. "Just run it, whatever you get."

I backed out of another room, staring. Even Ben wasn't who I thought he was. Reality was didn't exist anymore.

I was racing then like never before. I went to all three suspects one after the other—the doctor, the policeman, the computer wizard, the people whom no one in his right mind would have considered suspects—and let them hurl their vile accusations at each other once more. I revealed freely what I knew, tipped every hand I had, put it all on the table, then went outside after the last stop and lit up a cigarette. My hands were shaking. The smoke circled my head. It was quiet on the street, quiet in my head. I was in a very quiet place, and I knew it wasn't reality.

For in reality, I knew—the only reality that mattered—I'd alerted the Ripper. I'd told him it was time.

He responded.

Chapter 42

I BREAK UP WITH MY GIRLFRIEND AND KILL SOMEBODY

THE call came in from Bud Cable. I'd activated my WAC calmly, the buzz from the cigarette somehow modulating with the ongoing buzz in my head and leaving me in a strangely chilled state of consciousness. It wasn't exactly like remote control, although I knew what I had to do and knew I would do it. It wasn't exactly like preparedness, although I knew I had what I needed. Still, you're never ready, no matter how much you think you are, to confront pure evil.

My state of mind was, I think, a simple acceptance of inevitability, an understanding that it had all come down to pure and total egotism: mine versus the Ripper's. For it was egotism, I'd somehow come to understand, that this was all about, and I'd either have enough of it, or I wouldn't. It was fighting fire with fire, it was finding what it took to beat a madman; egotism is what makes us fight to survive. It had just taken me a while to realize that despite all the theories about getting into a madman's head, and despite the notion that you have to be crazy to catch a crazy person, it really comes down to something else: matching the force of their conceited will. And now that I was totally detached from everything I knew, both physically and psychically, I was ready to do just that. I felt stripped of all else.

And so I was collected when I saw Cable's face on the screen of my WAC. He was practically screaming. "Get over here!" he said. "The image is coming clear on the monitor! Hurry!" I could

tell it was frightening to him. Who knows what happens when you stare into the face of the devil?

I signed off and moved, still feeling strangely calm now that it was finally unfolding. I was confused, though, surprised that the Ripper was going to let me see his face, then let me hunt him down in reality. I fingered the WAC's transmitter button all the way to the Meta-Cog, toying with the idea of calling first Magnotta, then Falconetti, then Burton; I envisioned gathering them there in the ICU, circled around Catherine's bed, for I had a sudden weakening in my anger toward her. "See what you did to her?" I'd say. At the moment, it was true for me: The Ripper had done this to Catherine, and in more ways than one. It wasn't just the attack the Ripper had perpetrated upon her; it was that he'd given her an opportunity to be weak, to give in to her rapacious desires for money and fame, which was like a blood-lust itself. This wasn't her fault. I knew, because the Ripper had engendered this in me, too: I had a blood-lust to kill him.

I never had a chance to put the scenario in play, however, for when I got to the ICU, Cable was frantic. He was pounding the monitor, banging the controls, whacking the screen like a man made insane when the picture died during the final shot of the game.

"It's gone!" he shouted. "I had it, then it was gone! The system is locked, how could this happen—Burton's decked in, I can't get her out, either! Something's happening, Quinlan, something's happening! He's making his move!"

He was right: All the monitors in the room suddenly switched on, all by

Chapter 42

themselves. The Ripper's image crackled alive on them all, and his voice flooded the small room.

"I *am* making my move!" he boomed. His laugh made us grip our ears in pain. "Return to where you began, Mr. Quinlan—go back to the library! Take down the book on the Ripper once more and dig in! The stage is set, the roles are cast—for the final game of *Ripper*!"

I had the decking helmet in my hand before the echo of his final raucous laugh had died away. Cable was grabbing at me, but I shoved him aside. "I've got to," I told him. He dove back at me, trying to stop me, but I'd managed to punch the button. I was sailing, his voice fading away behind me shouting, "Nooooo!"

And then I was in the library, but the coding had been changed—there were no other books, no librarians, the stacks were gone. The book that had last been checked out by Renee Stein—and Mendler and Estevez before her, I suddenly knew—had grown and opened. It filled the room, and I came veering out of the cyber-tech darkness toward it like a falling angel. There was no stopping the fall, no shifting the aim; I landed right on it with both feet, heard the Ripper laugh thunderously, and felt cyberspace itself being rent open.

I came to on a patch of cold, fog-laced cobblestones. The earth was shaking.

I scrambled to my feet, struggling for balance, as spurts of fire leaped like sunspots in the distance, then disappeared behind a rolling wall of fog that swept over me. The cobblestones began to crack and bulge. The air was hot, then cool, then gushing all around. And then, with a deafening roar,

buildings lifted from the ground, three- and four-story red-bricked buildings, shops, and dwellings with awnings and wooden porches, one after the other, spearing skyward as if they were skyscrapers, grinding and shifting and settling like tectonic plates. Debris rained down, I threw my arms over my head, and felt a sharp, wrenching pain shoot through every nerve in my body. I looked up, saw the buildings looming over me, saw the fog thicken and blot out the sky, and watched the sheltering arms of my data angel morph into—me. With a gut-wrenching heave, it was like I'd been turned inside out, and somehow, the real me—my true physical self—had been transported to this reverse Sodom.

And then everything went quiet, the rumbling fading, with what sounded like the Ripper's laugh fading with it, all to echo in a ringing silence; then that was gone, too. It was as disorienting as if I'd been hit in the head. After all the colossal sound, sounds like a planet forming, there was nothing … absolute … nothing.

I took a step. The sound of it rang out on the cobblestones, which had miraculously returned to place. Slowly, it was as if my movement had turned something on. I looked around me, saw lights at head level emanating weakly through the fog, and gradually began to hear sounds—a faint hissing, a slight breeze. I looked at the lights and realized they were gas lamps. I looked at the fog, saw the breeze making it swirl. Then I heard the distant neighing of a horse, and the clatter of a carriage. It faded, and I knew where I was: I was in Hamilton Wofford's virtual Whitechapel. The Ripper's final version of the old Web Runners' game was going to be perfect.

I moved slowly, hesitantly, down the deserted street. There was no sign that anyone else was there, and I called out, "Hello? Hello?" but got no response. I stood in the middle of the street,

looking nervously at the dark opening of an alley, then spotting another, and trying to watch that one, too.

And then, with a dark whoosh, a burst of fog gushed from the first alley, and I saw all my suspects in it, their faces caught up in the mist like the souls of the damned. Their voices cut through, one at a time—"Not me! Not me!"—then tumbled together into fading cacophony.

And then I saw something that seemed left behind: an arcade fortune teller. I went up to it warily, and it seemed to register my presence. The wind began to swirl down the street behind me as the abbreviated gypsy inside activated, the arms lifting in herky-jerky motion, to a row of tarot cards. Beneath the line of medieval images, six slots stood open. An opening act, I could see, to the real game the Ripper planned to play; he wanted me to know my fate was sealed. The wind picked up behind me, whistling down the street, as if to remind me to rush, too.

I did, subconsciously directing my hands to the levers controlling first one card, then another. I don't know if the machine was helping, or if my data angel had been somehow pre-coded upon entry, but I knew the correct order of the cards: I selected the card for the seasons, then fear, then the reaper, followed by the wind and the sun and the rain. All else seemed irrelevant; this was the stuff of reality.

And then the wind took over, and the fog swirled in, and the fortune teller was gone. I was left with just the sound of the wind as it settled back down.

I made my way down the street, slowly, carefully, sensing the Ripper's presence ebbing and flowing—I tried to follow the sensation, but it was like following the wind. It would get stronger, then weaker, then draw so close it was like a hot breath on my cheek; then it would vanish again. I wandered the streets, moving faster and faster, until I was nearly trotting, and then I

rounded a corner and saw everyone else, waiting for me in a circle, all of them dressed in Victorian garb: Magnotta and Burton and Falconetti and — Catherine.

"Catherine!" I blurted. "What—"

"He made me, Jake, the Ripper brought me here, he—"

"Christ, Quinlan," Magnotta cut in, "I'm a cop! You don't think—"

"And I'm a doctor," Burton said. "I make a living out of saving people, not killing them!"

"Hey, buddy boy, I mean, come on, don't lump me in with these losers," Falconetti said. "I mean, after all the help I gave you?"

Their voices began to tumble then, and I could see they were all scared, and then I felt the weight in my hand—my left hand. I'd brought out the discus-shaped weapon Hamilton Wofford had given me without even realizing it.

But the Ripper realized it, and it must have left him scared, too, because the game seemed to shift away from plan, then, and everyone's image began to move uncontrollably in a circle, while their voices proclaimed their innocence. The jumble of voices rose, and rose, and the circle was suddenly around me, and closing in. It was the moment I'd been waiting for, but it wasn't playing out the way I'd expected it would.

I admit that I cowered then, quailed before what was happening. The circle tightened, the voices rose, and I felt as if I were giving in to an overpowering undertow. I looked up at the faces, saw the fear, heard the pleading, and thought: It's that one—no, that one—then lapsed into hopelessness.

But as they bore down on me, I came strangely into focus on one voice in the pack: the voice pleading most desperately, the voice saying I didn't mean to lie, I didn't mean to deceive—it was the voice that was *apologizing*.

And when I looked up at her, found her face in the movement, she said, "I did love you, Jake, I did."

It was her use of the past tense that did it.

I stood up, and the circle widened and slowed. I turned and scanned the faces with determination, the discus in my hand throbbing as I swung it around me. Perhaps Wofford's weapon had a power connected to the location he'd built; perhaps it was just the power of fear. The moment the circle slowed, I coiled, then released.

Catherine split apart with a sickening sound, a biologic rending of limbs being torn off, skin being ripped, bones being snapped, while the wind lifted in torrents like a tornado at birth. She screamed horribly, and the sound melded with the wind, and the earth began to quake, and I saw the tortured soul of the Ripper escape her, twisting and turning as it was wrenched skyward in the funnel cloud skyward. It yowled desperately, angrily, hopelessly, elongated painfully before us, then it was consumed by the black heavens …

The buildings began to rumble, and the earth shook. There was no time for anything else. Wofford had warned me that Whitechapel would become a conflagration if I used the weapon, and Lord knows I'd used it. It was Falconetti who grabbed me, shook me, and told me to run. I did, somehow, tore myself away and ran with the rest of them, and then we were all flying, as Whitechapel exploded behind us in a horrendous fireball.

Chapter 43

A.K.A. REALITY

WHAT can you say about a girlfriend gone bad? The funny thing was that I missed her. It took a while. I took permanent leave of everything—the newspaper, my apartment, certainly all knowledge of the ongoing lives of Clare Burton, Joey Falconetti, and Vince Magnotta. I stopped reading newspapers altogether.

I liked to think that eventually I would come back to some semblance of my old self, and that the visions would never return, and so I went off to wait for that day. The damn things still visited me with a vengeance for a while, afterwards, but they've been diminishing somewhat since. It took my mind a while to leave whatever plane of existence it had been in, the one where everyone not only could have been a killer, but was. But the fact of the matter is that the story only involved two killers: Catherine and me.

Which was what made me think about her again. It's hard not to think about someone you've killed. And somehow, I didn't really blame her for what she'd done. Not that I didn't think what she'd done was awful beyond imagination, and not even that I wasn't glad she was dead. I just had some understanding, like a two-bit but dedicated psychotherapist, that she'd been warped by the evil that's in all of us. She just didn't struggle hard enough to control it, the way the rest of us do every day.

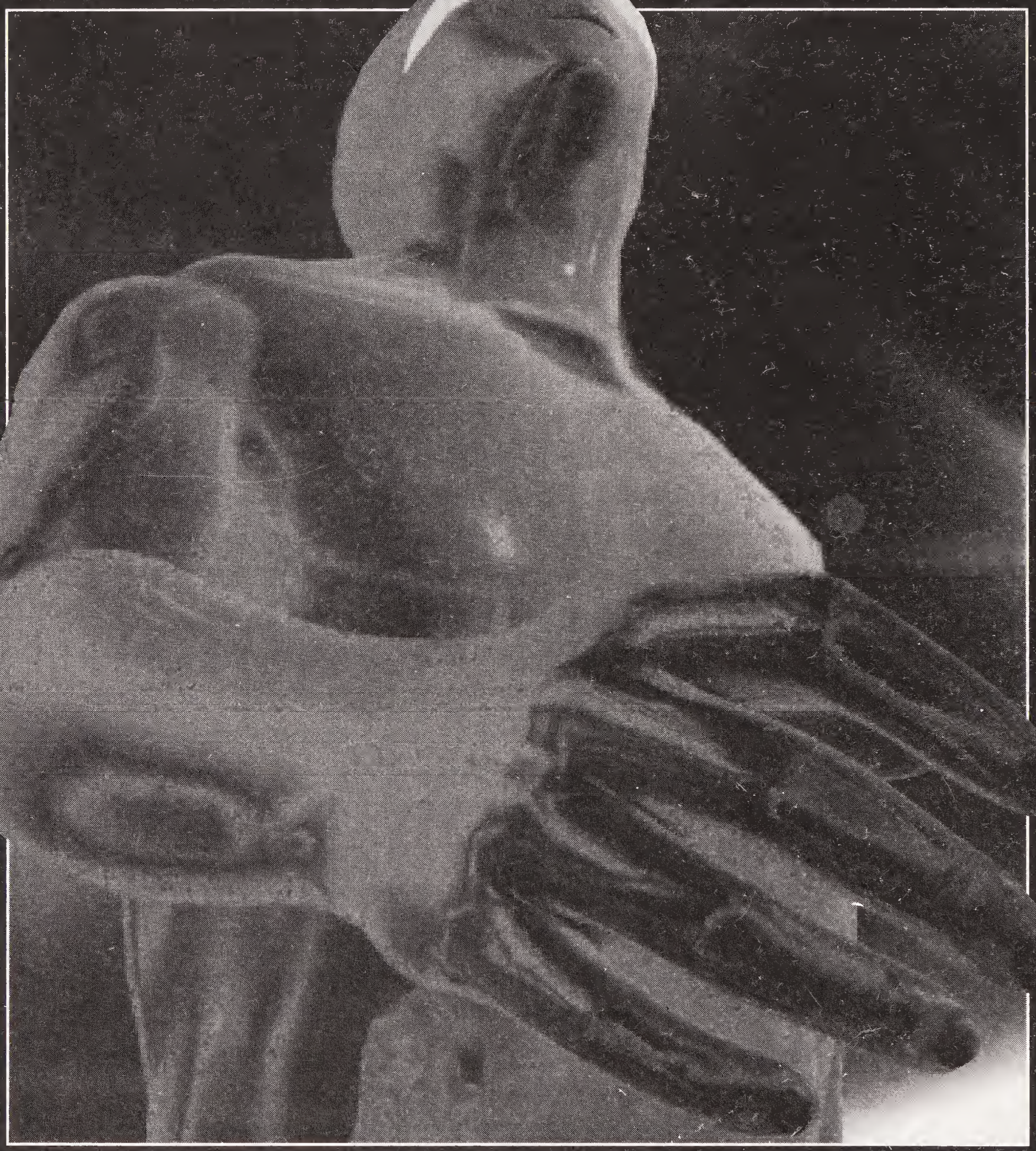
And that's when I miss her—when I realize that, on a few occasions, she did control it: When she was with me. She'd been taken over by, or had given in to, some powerful forces—greed,

revenge, jealousy. She'd been driven by a mistaken assumption—nobody murdered her mother, it turned out. It had been a once-in-a-lifetime programming glitch, back in the days when connecting your mind to a computer was still semi-dangerous. But, like jilted lovers everywhere, there were still occasions—usually dark and lonely nights with just me and a hoot owl—when all I could think was that maybe it had been true when she'd said, "I did love you, Jake."

On the whole, though, I was glad we broke up.

THE END

PART TWO



WALKTHROUGH

WALKTHROUGH

INTRODUCTION

What follows is a walkthrough of all three difficulty levels of RIPPER. Except where noted, the puzzles and combats usually remain the same at all levels of difficulty, but you will be given more or less of the puzzle clues that are hereby provided, and the combats will play at a slower or faster pace, depending on the level of difficulty you've selected.

Note that for all levels of difficulty, it is important that whenever you scan something into your WAC, you then examine it in the WAC's database. If you examine it before entering it into your WAC database, or simply enter it in your database but do not then examine it, necessary milestones will not be set.

You can also use the cheat sheet, located in the Appendix, to skip some puzzles and combats entirely. Cheat sheet codes work at all levels of play.

PROLOGUE

View the mysterious murder of a young woman named Renee Stein ....

MURDER SITE

Talk to forensics photographer Karl "Cold Karl" Stasiak. He's taking photos and scans of the body. Karl tells you that:

1. The murder is identical to previous murders; it's obviously the act of the Ripper.
2. He has no idea what the murder weapon is, although the wound is deep and precise; it must have taken someone very strong and with a strong, skilled hand.
3. A morgue pathologist named Vic Farley may be able to tell you more about the murder weapon.
4. Magnotta is acting strange.

Talk to Lt. Vince Magnotta, the lead detective on the case. Learn from him that:

1 This victim is a book publisher named Renee Stein.
2. There are no witnesses and no signs of forced entry.
3. There have been two previous Ripper murders.
4. Stein's murder has the same m.o. as the previous Ripper murders.
5. The victims seem to have no previous connections to each other.
6. The Ripper writes to you after each murder. You publish his letters in the Virtual Herald.
7. Magnotta doesn't like you.
8. At the time of her death, Stein was on her computer, decked into the cyberspace location of the New York Virtual Library.

After you've finished asking Magnotta all the questions, he breaks a mug that belonged to the victim. He seems to do it on purpose.

Use your WAC to scan the broken mug into your databank. (To do so, place your cursor over the broken mug and get the rotating WAC icon. Click on the broken mug and it will be automatically scanned into your database.)

After you've completed all of the above, your WAC will signal an incoming call from Catherine Powell, who is your assistant on the Ripper story, as well as your new girlfriend. She tells you something big is going on, but won't tell you what. Instead, she tells you to wait for her in the newsroom. She says if she's not there in an hour you should meet her at her apartment.

Reconstruct the pieces on the WAC screen. Use left-click to arrange the pieces, use right-click to rotate them into the proper orientation. Then left-click on the completed mug. The completed mug will reveal the word "**Salisbury.**"

Access the world map and select ...

NEWSROOM

When you automatically arrive at the newsroom you'll find your editor, Ben Dodds, waiting for you. He tells you he doesn't know what Catherine is up to, but whatever it was, it seemed important.

After speaking with Ben, you receive a message from the Ripper on your WAC. He takes credit for the Stein murder, then announces his next victim: Catherine Powell. You dash from the newsroom and automatically travel to Catherine's apartment.

CATHERINE'S APARTMENT

You get there before Catherine and wait impatiently. Finally the door opens and Catherine enters, but she seems to be staggering. She stumbles, then collapses in your arms. Her last word is a whispered "Ripper," before she lapses into unconsciousness.

END OF PROLOGUE

ACT I

You learn that Catherine survived her attack by the Ripper, but is in a coma. She has been taken to the Tribeca Center for Cyber-Cognitive Studies—the Meta-Cog for short. You begin Act I in the police station, where you hope to recover Catherine's WAC so you can see if it contains any notes that might explain what she was up to.

POLICE STATION

Talk to desk sergeant Lou Brannon to learn that:

1. Unbeknownst to you, Catherine was spending a lot of time at the police station working on the Ripper case.
2. Lou has no idea what the word "Salisbury" signifies.
3. Magnotta has a hot temper and shady ethics. He has a reputation for concealing, withholding, and destroying evidence.
4. Karl Stasiak has taken a leave of absence—apparently, the Ripper murders were too much for him.
5. Like Stasiak, Brannon thinks the man to talk to about the murder weapon is Vic Farley—the pathologist who works at the morgue located at the Meta-Cog.

Go to the evidence room to get Catherine's WAC. Officer Warren Spankowski, the desk clerk there, won't want to cooperate, but you have some dirt on him that you can use to persuade him. Take a direct approach with him—be rude. He'll back down and tell you that Magnotta took Catherine's WAC. He'll also mention that it's not the first time Magnotta has done something like this.

Go to Magnotta's office. He's not there, so you can look around. Scan the document with Magnotta's signature on it into your WAC database. On his desk, find the file concerning the investigation into the murder of someone named Hamilton Wofford. Scan this file into your WAC database as well.

As soon as you complete the above, Magnotta shows up. He realizes you were snooping and he's angry. Stand your ground and quiz him to learn that:

1. He claims there is no connection between the Wofford case and the Ripper case.
2. A doctor named Burton is in charge of Catherine's care at the Meta-Cog. Magnotta seems to act as if he knows her more than he would like to let on.
3. He has no new leads.
4. He doesn't want to talk about Catherine's case.
5. He admits to having Catherine's WAC, but says it's police evidence and he doesn't have to give it to you.

Access the world map and select …

META-COG

Talk to the receptionist at the front desk, Vivien Santiago. She flirts with you and:

1. Confirms that Dr. Clare Burton is in charge of Catherine's care.
2. Tells you the morgue is in the basement

Enter the elevator and push the button for "Wards" on the top floor. Go to the right and follow the hall to the ICU lab, an observation room and laboratory connected to the ICU. Dr. Clare Burton is there. She won't really want to talk to you, but you can get her to tell you that:

1. Catherine is in a very deep coma and she may never recover.
2. This is the worst case of psychic damage Burton has ever seen.
3. She's sure the Ripper is responsible.
4. It is possible to send something called a "data angel" (an agent representing a human in cyberspace) into Catherine's brain to investigate and perhaps improve her condition.
5. She doesn't know why Catherine is the only person to ever survive a Ripper attack, but suspects either the Ripper was interrupted, or Catherine fought back.

After talking to Burton, you can also talk to Dr. Bud Cable, Burton's assistant, who is standing nearby. From him, you can learn that:

1. On the monitor of his computer there is a image that was taken directly from Catherine's mind. It is her memory of the last thing she saw—her attacker, the Ripper. Unfortunately, the image is distorted and will only become clearer if her memories are restored.
2. Catherine's memory can be restored if a data angel is sent into her mind.
3. He doesn't understand, and seems annoyed by, the fact that Burton won't send a data angel into Catherine's mind; he seems to accuse Burton of dragging her feet on Catherine's treatment.
4. Detective Magnotta keeps showing up to check on

Catherine's progress.

5. Burton and Magnotta seem to know each other personally, and have a strong dislike for each other.

After asking Cable all the questions you can, find the video med-log (turn right from Cable). It records consulting sessions held in the ICU. Press the play button on the panel and view a recent consultation between Burton and her underlings—Cable and Dr. Pezzi. Burton will resist the advice of Pezzi and Cable to take a more direct line of treatment. After she leaves, they will express shock and annoyance at her seemingly conservative approach.

Take the elevator to the basement morgue.

Talk to Vic Farley, who is conducting an autopsy in the morgue. From him, you should learn that:

1. He can't figure out what the murder weapon is.
2. The cuts made by the Ripper are perfectly straight, as if a seam were undone.
3. No human could make such a cut.
4. He thinks Burton will probably call in someone named Joey Falconetti for assistance.
5. Falconetti is a cyberspace outlaw on the run and is hard to track down, but a guy named Gambit Nelson may be able to help you.
6. Gambit Nelson hangs out at the Cafe Duchamp.
7. Magnotta is tough to work with.

View the three corpses (from Farley, go left once, then straight ahead once). Click on each corpse to view a holographic depiction of trauma inflicted upon victims. Farley will explain what happened.

Access the world map and travel to ....

POLICE STATION

Visit Magnotta again and ask him about Joey Falconetti and Clare Burton.

Access the world map and go to ... .

CAFE DUCHAMP

Talk to Gambit Nelson. He'll tell you that:

1. Nelson is a cyberspace pioneer and entrepreneur.
2. He once did some business with Falconetti.
3. Falconetti is a thief.
4. Falconetti can be contacted through someone named Twig, who lives in Hoboken.

Speak to the bartender to learn more about Gambit Nelson.

Access the world map and go to ... .

NEWSROOM

Speak to your boss, Ben Dodds, to see if he knows anything about the people you've been hearing about. Dodds will tell you that:

1. Detective Magnotta is an over-aggressive cop who has killed six people in the line of duty, some under questionable circumstances.
2. The Herald ran a story on the Wofford murder. The report said that it appeared to have been a burglary gone bad.
3. He thinks he's heard of Joey Falconetti, but he can't quite place him at the moment.

Do some snooping around Catherine's desk.

1. Notice that Catherine has a calculator on her desk—you'll need it later.
2. Examine her Rolodex and make note of the names there and what it says about them, especially Soap Beatty and George Rhodes. (A good place to keep notes is in your WAC notebook.)

Go to your own desk (from the entrance, straight ahead once, to the right once) and read the note Catherine left on your desk telling you that if anything happens to her, you should "look to the crystals."

Access your computer's deck port. Journey into cyberspace. Once inside the cyberspace interface, access WELL locations by typing in the appropriate password at the relevant WELL icon. (You will not be able to access a WELL's icon if you have not achieved the appropriate milestone.)

Scroll left or right until you are offered the icon for the Virtual Library and travel to ....

VIRTUAL LIBRARY WELL

Talk to the Librarian to learn that Renee Stein was indeed in the library and that all she left behind was a scrap of paper, which is in the trash can icon.

Click on the flaming trash can icon and zoom in to see a list showing a series of books and call numbers. Ask the librarian to help you. She will tell you that Renee Stein apparently altered the call numbers for the book she was using. You'll need to unscramble the call letters.

To solve the puzzle:

1. Notice first that all the books on the list with historical subject matter have the letters "HC" as a prefix. You are looking for a history book, so type "HC."
2. Next, notice the bracketed section in Stein's entry (the entry that starts with her name and has no title listed.) Within the brackets are the letters "no iaid." Read this out loud and you have "no eye aid"—in other words,

20-20 vision. Following this is "+1", or "plus one." Translate this as "20-21." Type "2021" after "HC."

3. Following the brackets is the number 18. This refers to the eighteenth letter of the alphabet, "R."
4. The entire code is: **HC2021R**. Type the entire code and the librarian will automatically get the book for you. You will see that it is a book on the original Jack the Ripper. You realize this is no coincidence.

Exit cyberspace.

Access the world map and return to …

CATHERINE'S APARTMENT

Search Catherine's apartment for all possible clues.

Examine the birthday card dated February 25. This makes Catherine a Pisces. Notice that the card sits on a table beneath a painting of a fish, which is the sign of Pisces.

Examine the Zodiac poster. Note the Pisces constellation pattern (#12).

Examine Catherine's crystals, which sit in a box next to a grid. Zoom in on the grid. Arrange the crystals in the grid in the pattern of the Pisces constellation. The grid is nine columns wide by eight columns long. Place the crystals in the following spots (**NOTE:** The puzzle is the same at all three levels of difficulty, but some of the crystals will already be placed for you at the easier levels):

Column 1, Row 2
Column 2, Row 5
Column 3, Row 1
Column 4, Row 3 and Row 6
Column 5, Row 8
Column 6, Row 4
Column 7, Row 7
Column 8, Row 3
Column 9, Row 5 and Row 7

When the crystals are properly arranged, a beam of light emanates from them and highlights the title of a book. The title is **Horoscope.** This is the address to Catherine's WELL.

Examine the laser cane beneath the athletic poster. Note the inscription that reads "J. Dorsett."

Access the world map and travel to …

NEWSROOM

Go to your desk and use your computer to deck into cyberspace. Deck to … .

CATHERINE'S WELL

(Password: Horoscope)

As soon as you enter Catherine's WELL you will receive a warning to leave from an image of Magnotta, who, in an obviously recorded message, will tell you that the WELL is a restricted crime scene.

Battle your way past the subsequent virtual police robot that will be intent on blasting you from the system. You can destroy the robot by shooting out the flame-throwers on its hands, the orb in the center of the forehead, the burners on the bottom of the robot, or the power pack on its back. Hitting the burners or the back pack inflicts the most damage. Left-click to fire, right-click for shields when the robot gets too close. (**NOTE:** If you lose this combat, or any combat in the game, you will merely be booted out of the combat scene. You can go back in and try again.) Once you defeat the robot, you will be able to take Catherine's notebook. It will download to your database automatically. Leave Catherine's WELL.

Exit cyberspace.

Once you're out of cyberspace, look at Catherine's notebook in your database. You will find that Magnotta has apparently encrypted it somehow; you'll need to find a way to unscramble it later by finding out Magnotta's password to the encryption. It will be a word that has some personal meaning to him.

Access the world map and go to …

SOAP BEATTY'S SMOKESHOP

Talk to Soap to learn that:

1. He is a cyberspace jack-of-all-trades.
2. Catherine came to visit him regularly but he thought she was mysterious.
3. Catherine was trying to make a connection between the Ripper's victims.
4. You should expect some bizarre ICE when trying to enter private WELLs.
5. You may encounter people in cyberspace who represent themselves with video images.

Access the world map and travel to …

WOFFORD COTTAGE

Speak to Covington Wofford, the brother of the murdered Hamilton, to learn that:

1. His brother Hamilton was working on a mysterious project at the time of his murder.
2. Hamilton was a cyber-architect who built virtual environments. His last project before his death may have involved simulating an environment in Victorian England.
3. He believes Hamilton may have been murdered by the

Ripper.

4. Detective Magnotta confiscated a number of disks belonging to Hamilton.
5. There may be some clues in Hamilton's WELL, the address of which is hidden somewhere in the cottage.

Go to the table that's got an old picture tube and a panel with five antique vacuum tubes on it. Click on the power switch. You will see that only two of the tubes are working. To find Hamilton's WELL address, you must discover three antique vacuum tubes that are hidden somewhere in the cottage. They may be found in any order.

Go through the door into the next room, the living room. Notice the position of the three wall clocks in the room. Also, take note of the map of the world that shows worldwide time zones. You'll need both of these later.

Go to the table that looks like it has a maze embedded in the tabletop.

To find the first tube, solve the tabletop puzzle by sending a marble from the top of the table through the maze of chutes, which must be properly aligned, to the target hole at the bottom of the table. Pressing the numbers on the right side of the table will make adjustments to the chutes. When the chutes are properly aligned and the ball reaches the hole at the bottom, the vacuum tube will appear. Adjust the chutes as follows:

For Easy Mode: Press on pad number 4 (the pads are numbered top to bottom) followed by any other two pads except the first one.

For Medium Difficulty: Pads 1 and 4 must be green only.

For Difficult Mode: Press the pads numbered 5, 1 and 3; watch the ball travel until it comes to rest. Next, input the numbers 4, 1 and 5. Again, watch the ball. Finally, click on pads 3, 4 and 5. When the ball has finished tracing its course, a drawer will open automatically and you will be presented with a vacuum tube. (**NOTE:** The following sequence also works: 1, 2 and 5, followed by 1, 3 and 5, followed by 2, 3 and 5.)

Position the icon over the tube to get the hand icon; click on the tube. It will be placed in your inventory.

Go upstairs to the bedroom. On the way up the stairs, look at the plaque on the wall. It's in honor of the first patent awarded to Hamilton Wofford. Make a note of the patent code number: **P2X255127.5A.** Continue up the stairs and enter the bedroom. Look for the antique cash register on your right.

To obtain another tube, solve the cash register puzzle. The steps for this are:

1. Refer to the patent code number (**P2X255127.5A**).
2. Multiply 2 X 255127.5, which equals **510,255**.
3. Find the change bank connected to the cash register. (The change bank is to the left of the register.) By clicking on the buttons at the bottom of each cylinder, you can release coins of various denominations. The first cylinder contains pennies, the second cylinder contains nickels, the third dimes and the fourth quarters. The code 510255 is a clue to how to select the appropriate coins in a sequence that will open the register. Within the code, the proper sequence is represented as follows:
   5 represents a nickel
   10 represents a dime
   25 represents a quarter
   5 represents another nickel
4. Select the change in this order. The coins will roll down the slide one at a time, then be launched over the wall of the fort. The register will ring them up.
5. When all four coins have been rung up in the proper order, the register drawer will open, revealing another vacuum tube.
6. Take the tube.

Take note of the broken clock on the dresser between the beds. The clock is stopped at **2:35.**

To obtain the third tube, go back downstairs to the living room, then:

1. Go to the wall clocks. One is an Egyptian Great Pyramid clock, one a German cuckoo clock, and the third is a U.S. Army clock.
2. Next, look at the map of time zones. Note the time differences between the United States, Germany, and Egypt.
3. Go back to the clocks and set them as follows: Set the army clock to **14:35** (2:35 in military time) by clicking on the up and down arrows beneath the numbers; set the German clock to **8:35** by clicking on the hands of the clock; set the Egyptian clock to **9:35** by clicking on the left camel to set the hours, and the right camel to set the minutes; note that this last clock registers on a.m. and p.m., so if you set the numbers properly and it still doesn't seem to work, advance to 9:35 again. Once all the numbers are properly set, the cuckoo clock will chime and open, revealing the final vacuum tube.
4. Take the tube.

Once you have found all the vacuum tubes, go back to the workshop, where Covington is waiting. Go to the socket board and plug the three vacuum tubes into the socket board to replace the burned-out tubes. (To "use" an object, click on your inventory icon in the menu bar at the top of

the screen. Once your inventory screen comes up, click on the individual item you want to use—in this case, a vacuum tube—and then click "use." You will need to do this for each tube, one at a time.) When all three tubes have been plugged into the socket board, the picture tube will activate, revealing the name of Hamilton Wofford's WELL address: **Vulcan.**

Use the computer in the workshop to deck to Hamilton Wofford's WELL. To get to the decking port from the socket board, click right once, straight ahead once, left once, then straight ahead. Examine the port and you will get the decking icon.

Deck to …

WOFFORD WELL
(Password: Vulcan)

View the small tabletop model of a neighborhood in Victorian London known as Whitechapel—the location where the original Jack the Ripper stalked his victims. It appears that this is what Hamilton was working on at the time of his murder. This is all you can do in the Wofford WELL at the moment.

Leave Hamilton Wofford's WELL and exit cyberspace

Access the world map and go to … .

FALCONETTI'S SAFEHOUSE

Twig won't want to talk. Take the firm, angry approach and he'll talk. He'll tell you that:

1. Falconetti is the most incredible decker he's ever seen.
2. Falconetti can be found in a cyberspace WELL located at the address **Circus Maximus.**

Access the world map and travel to … .

NEWSROOM

Go to your desk and use your computer to deck into cyberspace. Deck to …

FALCONETTI'S CIRCUS WELL
(Password: Circus Maximus)

You find yourself bound to a knife-throwing target, with Joey Falconetti himself hurling knives and questions at you. Tell him about Catherine and ask for his help in decking to her mind.

Falconetti won't agree to help you until you successfully navigate a combat obstacle course he has designed. It's a cyberspace version of a police target range—targets of good and bad guys will pop up out of nowhere in a post-apocalyptic cityscape. Unfortunately, there's no way to tell good guys from bad guys, except that the good guys look more human and forlorn than the desiccated creatures that comprise the bad guys. Also, when you hit a bad guy (by left clicking on your mouse) they make a distinct clanging sound; when you accidentally hit a good guy, a buzzer sounds.

At the **difficult** level, you must hit the bad guys 5 times each (five clangs) and you can't hit any good guys.

At the **medium** difficulty level, you need to hit all the bad guys once, and no bad guys.

At the **easy** level, you can hit a good guy or two.

If you beat Falconetti's high score (30,000 points) he will agree to help you and instruct you to meet him back at his safehouse, where you previously encountered Twig.

FALCONETTI'S SAFEHOUSE

Talk to Twig once more. He'll tell you Falconetti is in the back room.

Go into back room and find Falconetti hanging in a decking harness as he emerges from cyberspace. Speak to him, asking all the questions you can, to learn that:

1. He knows—and hates—Magnotta.
2. He thinks Burton is secretly in love with him.
3. He is an avid knife collector, and an admirer of the Ripper.
4. He'll help you with Catherine if you ask, and if you remind him that it will really bug Magnotta.

Ultimately, Falconetti will agree to meet you at the ICU later.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

At the beginning of the act, you have reason to be equally suspicious of Detective Magnotta, Joey Falconetti and Clare Burton. You're also aware that you didn't know Catherine as well as you thought you did, either. You start off the act in the … .

META-COG

Stop by the reception desk and visit with Viv Santiago. She informs you that Joey Falconetti is in the ICU with Dr. Burton.

Go to the ICU observation lab, then on into the ICU itself, where you eavesdrop on a conversation between Burton and Falconetti. You deduce that they have known each other for a long time. It also sounds like they're hiding something.

Interrupt Burton and Falconetti's conversation. Interrogate both of them to learn that:

1. Burton refuses to discuss the length or the nature of her relationships with Magnotta and Falconetti.
2. Falconetti has a grudge against Magnotta for trying to pin a murder on him fifteen years ago.

3. Falconetti wants to deck into Catherine's mind in order to try to restore her memory.
4. Burton is opposed to allowing Falconetti to deck into Catherine's mind.

When Burton gives up in disgust and says she's going to the gym, you are free to go with Falconetti when he decks into Catherine's mind.

Use the computer (next to Falconetti) to deck into … .

CATHERINE'S MIND

As soon as you enter the cyberspace link to Catherine's consciousness, you will find yourself in a raging battle with ICE that resembles organic cells trying to prevent your invasion of Catherine's psyche. Shoot as many of the cells as you can while Falconetti tries to establish a link. You will hear him urging you on as you battle. You must hit as many of the cells as you can; if you don't hit enough, you will be booted out. The more you hit, the farther into Catherine's consciousness you will travel, and the more time Falconetti will have to establish a link. The idea is to stay in the combat as long as you can, until eventually the ICE will begin to overwhelm you. Once Falconetti establishes a link with Catherine's mind, however, he will come to your aid and finish the fight for you.

Once the ICE is defeated, you will be able to travel to the inner sanctum of Catherine's mind, where you'll find her lying in a suspended state of subconsciousness. Falconetti explains that you can rebuild her memory by telling her everything you know about her recent investigations into the Ripper case. He urges you to return as often as you can with more information. This is the only way to restore her memory and improve the image of the Ripper on the ICU monitor. Unfortunately, you have nothing to tell her at this point. But now that you know how to reach her inner consciousness, you can gather more information and return later to rebuild her memory.

Exit Catherine's mind and return to the ICU, where Falconetti says good-bye for now.

Leave the wards and go to the basement morgue to talk to Vic Farley. To your surprise, you find someone else in his place—Bob Eppels.

Talk to Eppels to find out that Farley was fired—Eppels thinks it was for "talking too much."

Access the world map to travel to …

POLICE STATION

Stop to talk to Lou Brannon, and watch closely when Magnotta interrupts the conversation to tell Brannon he's going into interrogation and leaves his weapon and security card in a tray on the desk. Magnotta leaves and Brannon gets a phone call.

Take the security card.

After Brannon finishes his phone call, talk to him to learn that:

1. Magnotta seems to be dragging his feet on the Ripper investigation.
2. Magnotta has been delving into police files concerning Falconetti.
3. Magnotta knew Hamilton Wofford—he once hired Wofford to build a virtual target range for police cadets.

Leave the desk and go to the observation room adjacent to the interrogation room (click straight ahead once, then left once, then straight ahead twice, then left once, then straight once and right once).

Enter the observation room and activate the two-way mirror by clicking on the control panel (to the lower left of the viewing window). Watch Magnotta interrogate a suspected drug dealer.

Exit the interrogation observation room and go straight ahead to the file room. Use the security card on the file cabinet in the center of the room. Scan Magnotta's personnel file. You realize that perhaps the code word that would un-encrypt Catherine's notebook entries is hidden here. It is—if you're in easy or moderate puzzle mode. In easy mode, the code word is **Slayer.** If you're in moderate mode, the code word is **Scorpio.** If you're in difficult mode, the code word is **Cigar.** Access Catherine's notebook in your WAC database and type the appropriate code word in the space at the bottom of the scrogged entries.

When Catherine's notes begin to slowly unscramble, read the first three entries (the others will take some time to unscramble; you'll have to come back to them later). The first three entries reveal:

1. That Catherine has found many striking similarities between the modern-day Ripper and the original Jack the Ripper. Also, she is certain that the Ripper is one of three people: Magnotta, Falconetti, or Burton. She stresses the importance of investigating all three.
2. That she noticed a book in Burton's office called Advanced Notional Mapping, and that it had an inscription Catherine thought might constitute a lead.
3. That Soap Beatty has "delivered" something to Catherine that will enable her to learn more about her three prime suspects. Whatever it is, it seems she's hidden it in a book entitled The Women of Whitechapel and Jack the Ripper. At the end of this entry, Catherine

goes off on a tangent about her living situation when she was younger. She writes, "At first, I didn't have two nickels to rub together. I lived in a ratty triplex for half a dozen years. That will never happen to me a second time." The sudden oddness of the language, especially the redundant numerical references and metaphors, is a clue: While it may seem like Catherine is saying Soap gave her money, she is actually hiding a number code. "At first" means one; "two nickels" means two fives; "triplex" means three; and "second time" means two. Thus, Catherine indicates the number sequence **155362.** You'll need this at your next stop.

Access the world map and travel to …

CATHERINE'S APARTMENT

Find the book The Women of Whitechapel and Jack the Ripper on Catherine's shelf. Examine it to find that it's a book-safe with six buttons on it. Starting with the button at the top as 1, press the code you found in Catherine's notebook entry—**155362**—into the buttons on the safe. It will open the book-safe. Inside you'll find a compact disk.

Use the CD on Catherine's computer. The formula **46 X 2^2 ÷ 7inv = 5** appears. Make note of this formula; you'll need it later.

Access the world map and return to …

NEWSROOM

Go to Catherine's desk and type the formula **46 X 2^2 ÷ 7inv = 5** into her calculator. The calculator will pop open and reveal two surveillance bugs, one that looks like an eyeball and another that looks like a cigar band. From your early days as a tech-news reporter, you recognize them as Balk series surveillance devices, a type of bug that can be keyed to specific voice combinations. It is obvious to you that Catherine intended to plant the cigar band in the stogie-chomping Magnotta's office, and the other in Clare Burton's office, where there must be some kind of anatomical bust in which you can replace the eyeballs. You automatically code the devices to key on any combination of Magnotta, Burton, and Falconetti's voices, and pocket them for later implementation.

Access the world map and go to …

POLICE STATION

Go to the interrogation observation room and activate the viewing window. Watch Magnotta interrogating a drug dealer. You realize he's going to be in there a while.

Go to Magnotta's office and plant the surveillance device that looks like a cigar band in the cigar box.

Access the world map and go to …

META-COG

Stop by the reception desk and speak briefly with Viv Santiago. Take the security card on the counter to her right.

Take the elevator to the wards and turn left to go to Clare Burton's office. Use the security card on her door to gain entry. Once inside, you need to:

1. Plant the surveillance device that looks like an eyeball in the anatomy model that she has on her shelves (turn left inside the doorway). To do so, you must first remove one of the eyeballs already in the model.
2. Go to Burton's desk and scan her prescription pad. The top sheet is already signed, and you'll need a copy of Burton's signature later.
3. Find a to-do list Burton has left for herself. It clearly indicate she knows more than she's letting on.
4. Read the list to discover that:

a) Burton intends to send an encoded e-mail message to someone named Rhodes.
b) She thinks Magnotta is a "maniac" and wants to keep him away from Catherine.
c) She wants to keep someone named "Joey" out of it, too. She says Magnotta will expect her to bring him in and this would incriminate both her and "Joey."
d) Burton wants to examine the body of Renee Stein, but only after Vic Farley has left the morgue.
e) Burton also wants to "keep a lid on" Farley and prevent him from digging too deep into the case.
f) Burton keeps a regular appointment at the gym.

5. Examine the book Catherine mentioned in her notebook, Advanced Notional Mapping. (It's on the book shelf to the left of the anatomy model.) Examine it to find the inscription inside. It is from an NYU professor named Lillian Bech, and from the tone it sounds as if they are well acquainted. You assume Burton was her student. You decide to visit Bech; as Catherine said, it's a long shot, but it's all you've got at the moment.

Access the world map and travel to …

PROFESSOR BECH'S OFFICE

Question Professor Bech to learn that:

1. She is a professor of cyber-surgical studies, and Clare Burton was her student—one of the most talented she ever taught.
2. Bech didn't have Falconetti as a student, but she knew

of him. She believes Falconetti had some sort of relationship with Burton.

3. Burton and Falconetti were founding members of an underground cyberspace gaming club called the Web Runners.
4. The Web Runners club still exists. They post announcements of meetings at their hidden clubhouse on the bulletin board outside Bech's office.
5. Bech knew of Magnotta, too, because Burton used to speak of his temper.

Leave Professor Bech's office and go to the electronic bulletin board (click straight ahead once, then right once). Get the hand icon and activate the board.

One at a time, click on each of the eight fliers that appear on the left of the board. This will bring up an enlargement of the individual fliers in the yellow-bordered area on the right half of the bulletin board. You need to find the five fliers that, when arranged in a line at the bottom of the bulletin board, will reveal the location and time of the Web Runners' meeting.

To solve the puzzle, you need to find the five fliers that have a number on the last line of the text (excluding the flier that ends in a telephone number). In the necessary order of placement, the numbers you're looking for are: **4, 50, 14, 42, and 86.** (Make note of these numbers, as they will also provide you with the necessary combination to open the door to the Web Runners' loft once you get there.) Once the fliers are assembled in this order—and arranged so that they do not overlap—the information is still somewhat obfuscated; other words appear in the lines hiding the sequenced message, and the words you need are in different lines from flier to flier. The message you seek is that the "(Jack) Web Runners (NYUer) will be meeting at a new address: a former warehouse converted to a loft apartment on Grammercy Street all this month." Once you have the fliers in the proper order, however, it will be automatically recognized, and the milestone will be set; you can now travel to the Web Runners' loft.

Access the world map and go to ...

WEB RUNNERS' LOFT

View the door-lock device on the entrance to the Web Runners' loft. Press the "Code" key, then enter the combination of numbers from the bulletin board—**450144286**—into the keypad. The door will open automatically and you will enter the loft.

You observe Kashi Yamamoto, a club member who is decked into a cyberspace game. Interrupt her and talk to her to learn that:

1. Burton and Falconetti were founding members of the Web Runners.
2. Falconetti is a legend amongst cyberspace hackers.
3. Yamamoto has heard of Magnotta, too.
4. The address to the Web Runners WELL is **Anachrony Station**.

Look at the pictures on the wall to see fifteen-year-old photos of Magnotta, Falconetti, Burton and the other founding members of the Web Runners.

Access the world map to return to ...

NEWSROOM

Go to your desk and use your computer to deck in to ... .

WEB RUNNERS' WELL
(Password: Anachrony Station)

You are confronted by ICE in the form of a picture of the Web Runners' logo, which suddenly scrambles into a sliding tile puzzle in which one square remains open. Rearrange the tiles until they re-form the picture of the logo. At the upper levels of difficulty, this puzzle loads the movement patterns randomly, so try it on the easy level first. Once you've succeeded, enter the WELL.

The WELL is an archive, represented by a stack of monitors that can be clicked on individually, each one prompting an extremely detailed background file and photo of one of the founding members. The files are lengthy and elaborate, but listen closely to learn:

1. Ripper victims Mendler, Estevez, and Stein, along with someone named Stephanie Jordan, were founding members of the Web Runners, along with Burton, Magnotta, and Falconetti.
2. Another founding member, Josie Dorsett, was killed under what the archive calls "very mysterious circumstances." It does not say how she was killed, but implies that other Web Runners were involved.
3. Josie Dorsett was survived by an ex-husband and teenaged daughter.
4. Vince Magnotta accused Falconetti of murder, and arrested him. Although the archive does not say who Falconetti supposedly murdered, it does indicate that the evidence was later dismissed as falsified, and Falconetti was freed.
5. Burton and Falconetti were married. What's more, their wedding ceremony was crashed by Magnotta, who claimed he was in love with Burton. Burton later divorced Falconetti.

6. Magnotta was a master of cyberspace whose talents were exceeded only by Falconetti.

Exit the Web Runners' WELL and exit cyberspace.

Access the world map and return to …

NEWSROOM

If you've completed all the tasks in the Web Runners' WELL, access the world map and reselect the newsroom; as soon as you return, the following sequence of events will automatically take place:

1. Stephanie Jordan contacts you on your WAC, says she is in danger, and pleads with you to meet with her at the Web Runners' loft.
2. You travel to the loft, but it takes you over an hour to get there because of traffic. When you finally arrive, you find that Stephanie Jordan has been murdered by the Ripper. The police have been in and out quickly, taking her body.
3. You find a stunned and upset Kashi Yamamoto in the loft. Nearly delirious, she tells you what happens automatically.
4. Magnotta contacts you immediately after you speak with Kashi. He hints that he is suspicious of you because you were the last person to speak with Jordan. When you ask him where Jordan's body has been taken he hangs up on you.

Access the world map and go to …

META-COG

Go to the morgue to see if Stephanie Jordan's body has been taken there.

Talk to Bob Eppels to find that he doesn't know where Jordan's body has been taken because the computer in the morgue is broken. If you help him fix it, he'll use the computer to get the information you need.

View the computer (one click left of Bob Eppels) and see that it's a circuit card/memory board problem. You know you need to know more, and you know just where to get the right information—Soap Beatty's got a cyber-tech book and magazine rack in his smoke shop.

Access the world map and travel to … .

SOAP BEATTY'S SMOKESHOP

Talk to Soap to learn that Gambit Nelson—the cyberspace entrepreneur and gamer you spoke to at the Cafe Duchamp—may know more about the Web Runners.

Go to the magazine rack (click left twice) and examine Popular Cybertronics. Scan it into your WAC database and read the article. It is an extremely dense and complex piece on chip placements on a computer memory board. It's difficult reading, but you'll need it to solve the memory board puzzle back in the Meta-Cog.

Access the world map and go back to …

META-COG

You need to solve the memory board puzzle now to get any further assistance from Bob Eppels. Go to the computer and view the circuit card (your WAC scan of the article will show it on the screen for convenience). To solve the memory board puzzle, you must insert the following chips—represented here by their pin numbers—in their correct locations on the memory board. The memory board is divided up into rows 1 through 5, top to bottom, with the positions in each row given left to right. The chips should be placed as follows:

In Row 1	
Chip 1	XDD3 7916 EPER 9RJ
Chip 2	XD77 3966 PETE 9RJ
In Row 2	
Chip 1	XDD7 3912 PETE 9RJ
Chip 2	XD77 3956 PEET 9RJ
Chip 3	XDD3 7916 PETE 99J
Chip 4	XD77 3959 PEET 9RJ
Chip 5	XDD7 3912 EPER 9RJ
In Row 3	
Chip 1	XDD7 3912 EPER 18J
Chip 2	XD77 3959 PETE 9RJ
Chip 3	XDD7 3912 PEET 9RJ
Chip 4	XD77 3956 PELT 9RJ
Chip 5	XDD3 7916 PETE 18J
In Row 4	
Chip 1	XDD3 7916 EPER 18J
Chip 2	XD77 3959 KOH 18J
In Row 5	
Chip 1	XD77 8959 KOH 18J
Chip 2	XD77 3956 PETE 9RJ

Once you've inserted the proper chips into the proper chips slots, the computer is fixed, and Eppels uses it to find that Jordan's body has been taken to the animal storage area. He refuses to tell you any more, but when you press him he lets it slip that it is located through the door in the back of the morgue.

You will be able to read another entry in Catherine's notebook at this point. It says that Vic Farley told her about

a secret project that Clare Burton was conducting in a "restricted area" of the Meta-Cog. Catherine wonders if this could have anything to do with the Ripper, but she couldn't get into the area because it had a voice lock on the door. She reminds herself to get an audio editor, after checking with Soap Beatty and the Virtual Library.

Go to the animal storage area and, once inside, find another door that has a voice lock on it. You surmise that this is the door to the "restricted area" Catherine was talking about, and that behind this door Clare Burton is conducting some sort of secret research. Most likely, only Burton's voice can open the voice lock.

Access the world map and travel to …

SOAP BEATTY'S SMOKESHOP

Ask Soap if he knows anything about voice locks. He suggests getting an audio editor and making a recording of the lock's owner saying, "It's me, open up." You remember that Catherine had also mentioned getting an audio editor in her notebook entry.

Access the world map and go to …

NEWSROOM

Go to Ben Dodds office and ask him if he knows anything about:

1. Falconetti and Burton; he won't remember anything at the moment.
2. Gambit Nelson; he'll say he already told Catherine, and chide you for not sharing sources with each other.
3. The Wofford murder; he'll tell you to stick to the Ripper story.

Go to your desk and deck to …

VIRTUAL LIBRARY

Talk to the librarian and ask to sign out an audio editor. She'll download the software to your WAC database.

Exit cyberspace.

Access the world map and travel to …

GYM

Talk to the gym attendant to learn that:

1. Burton is an avid runner who regularly runs the virtual Victorian London course on the treadmill.
2. Personal records of gym members can be found on the terminal on the counter.

Go to the terminal and look up Burton's file. You discover that she has listed Joey Falconetti as the person to contact in the even of an emergency. He is listed as Burton's spouse.

Go into the gym and confront Burton. Speaking with her, you:

1. Accuse her of being too conservative in Catherine's treatment.
2. Ask her why Vic Farley was fired and hear her claim to know nothing about it.
3. Hear her admit that she was in the Web Runners.
4. Tell her that you know she was married to Falconetti.
5. Learn that Magnotta has a fifteen-year-old grudge against her.
6. Find out that Magnotta is obsessed with her and out to get Falconetti.
7. Inform her of Stephanie Jordan's murder.
8. Record her voice so you can edit it and use it to activate the voice lock.

Access the world map and return to …

META-COG

Go through the morgue and into the animal storage room to the voice-locked door.

Open your WAC database and select "sound sample." This is your recording of Burton's voice. The audio-editor screen will appear, too, just beneath the sound file. The control buttons at the bottom of the audio editor will operate either screen, you just need to click on the screen you want. To edit the sample of Burton's voice:

1. Click on "Quantize." This will make each word and syllable of Burton's voice more distinct, and thereby easier to edit.
2. Click on the Burton audio file and hit the play button; carefully note which portion of the sound wave coordinates with which word of Burton's quote. Identify the portions of the sound wave that represent the words, "This is Dr. Burton. Open up."
3. Click on those sections of the file to highlight them; you can hit the play button at this point to hear how just the highlighted section sounds, and adjust the highlighting if you need to. Then, drag the highlighted sections, one after the other—and in the proper sequence—down to the audio-editor screen.
4. Hit "play."

NOTE: This is an extremely difficult puzzle, no matter the level of puzzle play you've chosen. You must be extra careful to make the final product sound as natural as possible, with no extra hesitation between words. To achieve this, it's best to clip the words one at a time, even when they appear next to each other in the original sound

file, such as the words "doctor" and "Burton," or "open" and "up." (In the phrase "this is," however, it's impossible to separate the two words.) Even doing this, however, you must still be careful to avoid getting parts of neighboring sounds or silences. It's extremely difficult, for example, to edit the word "up" without getting the final sound from the previous word, "open," so that invariably you have the sound "nup." This small slip, however, will prevent you from winning the puzzle. This voice lock doesn't like space between the words, either. What's more, the editor doesn't give you a chance to actually edit the sounds once you've dragged them down into the audio editor—if have a perfect sounding phrase except for the very last "nup," you'll be out of luck, so make sure you've got it the way you want it before you drag the highlighted sound into the editor.

Move forward down a subterranean hallway toward Burton's secret lab, built in an out-of-service subway car. Move forward until you come to an abandoned storage room, where you see Stephanie Jordan's body.

As soon as you see the body, you'll get a message on your WAC from the Ripper. He'll tell you, "You've looked in my eyes," making you think you're on the right track … but he'll also warn you that Stephanie Jordan's body is evidence of what happens when you get too close to him.

Examine the chart on the gurney bearing Stephanie Jordan's body, then move forward into the lab itself, where you'll see a tortured-looking monkey in a cage hooked up to machinery.

Find the video-med journal (it's on the counter to your left as soon as you enter the room; the control device looks like a high-tech flashlight). Activate the device to view a previously recorded session. It shows Burton adjusting sliders on a control panel and the monkey responding in pain. You observe that the monkey's thoughts are translated into language by a computer.

After viewing the video-med log playback, move down the counter to the same machine you saw Burton adjusting in the playback. Adjust the sliding switches as follows: From the end of the panel closest to you, move the **left slider up 9 lines;** move the **center slider up 1 line;** and move the **right slider up 5 lines.** Although the monkey's words are halting and his sentences fragmented, he reveals to you that Burton is conducting experiments on monkeys in cyberspace, and that sometimes the results are lethal to the monkeys. In other words, Burton is capable of killing from cyberspace.

Access the world map and go back to the … .

GYM

Confront Burton with your knowledge of her secret lab. She'll claim she's conducting legitimate scientific research there.

Consult your WAC to discover that another one of Catherine's notebook entries has been decoded. It informs you that:

1. Catherine discovered that Falconetti has a secret WELL, and the address for it is **Leather Apron**. She says there are "interesting" things there that make Falconetti look guilty.
2. Catherine is worried about keeping her "efforts" secret from you.

Access the world map and return to … .

NEWSROOM

Go to your desk and use your computer to deck to … .

FALCONETTI'S WELL
(Password: Leather Apron)

Solve the entry puzzle by shifting the tiles of stained glass until they form an image of Falconetti's face. At the upper levels of difficulty, this puzzle loads randomly, so the pattern of movement will change every time you play it. Try it at the easy level first.

Enter the WELL and observe the cloaks, daggers, and other Jack the Ripper paraphernalia, including letters written by the original Ripper.

Find Falconetti's journal (the book levitating on a floating lectern) and read the incriminating entry that says:

1. "Josie was the first.
2. "Victor Estevez—Got him during a late night at the office. A programmer is easy pickin's.
3. "Sam Mendler—Whacked him right inside his Laundromat after hours.
4. "Renee Stein—Old Salisbury died in her village loft. Will Stephanie be next?"
5. Access the world map and travel to … .

FALCONETTI'S SAFEHOUSE

Go into the back decking room (Twig won't stop you) and confront Falconetti and learn that:

1. Burton, Magnotta and Falconetti were all friends at one point.
2. Falconetti still seems upset and sad about the fact that Magnotta disrupted Falconetti and Burton's wedding ceremony. He says Magnotta always had the hots for Burton.

3. Falconetti knew Stephanie Jordan, although he lies—badly—about knowing her at first.

Access the world map and go to ...

POLICE STATION

Visit Lou Brannon and ask him if here's anything new on the Jordan case.

Go to Magnotta's office and confront him. Quiz him until you find out that:

1. The murder weapon still hasn't been identified.
2. He is elusive about his involvement with the Web Runners.
3. He hates Falconetti and has it in for him.
4. He is highly annoyed when you mention Burton's marriage to Falconetti, and even more annoyed when you ask him about his affair with Burton.
5. He may be investigating Burton as well.
6. He is intrigued when you tell him that Burton has Stephanie Jordan's body in a secret lab.
7. He seems strangely confident about "the wheels of justice" when you accuse him directly.

Access the world map and travel to ... .

META-COG

Find Dr. Bud Cable (he's standing near Catherine in the ICU). He will urge you to return to Catherine's mind and feed her more information.

Access the ICU computer to deck to ....

CATHERINE'S MIND

Enter the inner sanctum of Catherine's mind and tell her the things you've uncovered that you think she knows (things you discovered thanks to her notebook entries). In order, tell her that:

1. Burton and Falconetti were married fifteen years ago.
2. Burton, Magnotta and Falconetti were all in the Web Runners.
3. Magnotta was in love with Burton and disrupted her and Falconetti's wedding.
4. Burton has a secret lab in the basement of the Meta-Cog.

When you give this information to Catherine, she responds with a faint stirring, murmuring, and even a scream. She eventually sits up and talks. It is a sign that her memory is being restored.

Leave Catherine's mind and return to the ICU. As soon as you get back, you'll automatically receive a mysterious letter from the Ripper on your WAC—he says he's having a bad day, but he's glad he has a hobby to take his mind off his troubles.

Talk to Cable, who will tell you that, partly as a result of your efforts, she's making astounding progress.

On you way out of the ICU, view the image of the Ripper on the monitor in the lab. It has improved somewhat.

Access the world map and go to any location (except the Cafe Duchamp). As soon as you relocate, you'll get a WAC message from Vic Farley. He pleads with you to meet him immediately at the Cafe Duchamp.

Access the world map again and travel to ....

CAFE DUCHAMP

You automatically walk into the cafe and meet with Farley. He tells you that he has learned how the Ripper is killing—not with a conventional weapon, but through cyberspace. In other words, the Ripper doesn't even have to be near his victims to kill them. Vic will explain briefly how it works, but will have to cut himself off when he begins to feel ill. Then, suddenly, he will explode before your eyes.

END OF ACT II

ACT III

Throughout Act III, you will receive surveillance transmissions from the bugs you placed in Magnotta's office and in Burton's office. They are prompted by the number of locations you have visited. They will show various scenes of Magnotta, Burton, and Falconetti arguing and making accusations about who they think is the Ripper. **You cannot get to the end of the game unless you have seen all the surveillance transmissions.** If you go to all the locations as follows, you will receive all the transmissions.

View the scene in which Detective Magnotta interrogates you, making you feel that once again he is the prime Ripper suspect. Then travel automatically to the Wofford cottage in Central Park, where you save Covngton Wofford from an assassination attempt. You wound the attacker in the shoulder but he (or she—you can't tell) gets away. The attacker drops his weapon, however—a knife. Using your WAC, you scan the knife for fingerprints, and an image of the knife registers in your database. It is at this point that clues in the story will begin to diverge between four separate scenarios. (**NOTE:** Follow the branching in the first two locations below and you'll be able to tell which scenario you're in by the time you've completed all the tasks in the second location. If you want to know who the murderer is in each scenario, they are

revealed on the last page of this walk-through.) In one scenario—scenario 4—the knife has detectable fingerprints, which you will have a chance to find out about later. In the other three possible scenarios, there are no prints on the knife. Before you leave the Wofford Cottage, Covington reveals that he has an AI of his murdered brother that you can talk to; he trusts you completely now, so he downloads his brother's AI into your system. you will be able to interrogate Hamilton Wofford later at the Wofford WELL. For now, you travel back automatically to the police station, where you immediately get a message on your WAC from Gambit Nelson. He tells you that he just visited Falconetti's WELL and saw a book there that might interest you.

POLICE STATION

Talk to desk sergeant Lou Brannon to learn Magnotta has succeeded in sowing suspicion about you—even Lou seems to think he should be wary of you. He tells you to watch your step around Magnotta.

If you're in scenario 4: The knife had fingerprints on it. You'll get a prompt whereby you can ask Lou to run a check on them. He'll tell you that the prints belong to a thug who works for a mob boss named Vigo Haman. Ask about Haman and find out that he can usually be found at the Cafe Duchamp. If you do not receive a prompt from Lou, you're not in scenario 4. Whether you are or not, you should continue on to …

Talk to Magnotta to learn that:

1. He hurt his shoulder in another "interrogation."
2. He still refuses to give you Catherine's WAC.

If you're in scenario 3: Accuse Magnotta of being the Ripper. He tells you that he has arrested Falconetti for being the Ripper. He produces a picture of Falconetti as the Ripper, claiming he sent some of his own agents into Catherine's mind and finished the retrieval of the Ripper image, and it turned out to be a picture of Falconetti.

If you're in scenario 3: Access the world map and move ahead one location to Magnotta's apartment.

If you're in scenario 1, 2, or 4: Falconetti will have been released while you were talking to Magnotta. (You are in scenario 1, 2, or 4 if Magnotta has not given you a picture of Falconetti as the Ripper.) Access the world map and go to … .

FALCONETTI'S SAFEHOUSE

Go to the back room to talk to Falconetti and:

1. Find out he hurt his shoulder throwing knives.
2. Tell him he's the most likely suspect; he'll admit as much.

If you're in scenario 2: When you tell Falconetti he is the most likely suspect, he will give you a picture he says he took in Catherine's mind that shows Magnotta as the Ripper.

Access the world map and go to … .

MAGNOTTA'S APARTMENT

If you're in scenario 1, 2, or 4: As soon as you arrive, you receive a WAC message from the Ripper. He says he wishes he'd seen your face when your friend (Vic Farley) exploded, and that you should warn your readers that he doesn't have to be near his victims to kill them. It confirms what Farley told you just before his death.

You've decided to get Catherine's WAC by whatever means possible, but you're prevented from entering Magnotta's apartment by a complicated door lock.

To solve the puzzle of how to open the lock, you must first examine it to see that it has two sections: a combination entry pad (on the right side of the door) and a circuitry panel (to the left side). On the circuitry panel, note the number 4 in the upper corner of the panel. Then, divide the rest of the numbers by four. Enter the resulting code, **226481**, into the buttons on the entry pad on the right hand panel: press the corresponding X buttons in sequence—the second X button, twice, the sixth button once, then the fourth button, then the eighth, and finally the first one.

Enter Magnotta's apartment and:

1. Observe that it is loaded with expensive, high-tech computer equipment. You conclude Magnotta is wealthier, and more of a cyber-tech expert, than you assumed.
2. Notice the neon sign of the name "Clarence" on the wall.
3. Find Catherine's WAC (it's on the desk to the left of the bed). Notice the shooting target with a picture of Falconetti on it.
4. Copy the final notebook entry on Catherine's WAC to your WAC database by using the scanner on your WAC.
5. Access your WAC database and read Catherine's final entry. It reveals that she believed the clue to the identity of the Ripper could be found in the Ripper game played by the Web Runners.

Access the world map and go to …

NEWSROOM

If you're in scenario 3: As soon as you arrive, you receive a WAC message from the Ripper. He says he wishes he'd seen

your face when your friend (Vic Farley) exploded, and that you should warn your readers that he doesn't have to be near his victims to kill them. It confirms what Farley told you just before his death.

Go to Ben Dodds' office to find he is outraged at Magnotta's treatment of you—he's heard all about your "interrogation" and has already instructed The Herald's lawyers to file a formal complaint. Talk to him to learn that:

1. Catherine told him a different background story about herself than she told you—she told you she was from L.A., and she told Dodds she was from Philadelphia.
2. He's surprised to learn that you think the Ripper tried to kill Covington Wofford, and points out that the Ripper hasn't used a gun in his other killings.
3. He thinks you're covering the story the best way possible, and confirms that the police are acting strange; he blames the new bounty system.

If you're in scenario 4: Ask Dodds about Vigo Haman.

Time to investigate the Wofford WELL, and see what Covington has downloaded to your system. Go to your desk and deck into cyberspace. Deck to ...

WOFFORD WELL
(Password: Vulcan)

You're confronted by a holograph of Hamilton Wofford, Covington's murdered twin. The holograph of Hamilton represents an artificial intelligence he left behind to say good-bye to Covington. When he programmed the AI, Hamilton believed he would be talking to his brother, so in his responses to you he calls you Covington. Talk to him to learn that:

1. He became suspicious that it was the Ripper who hired him to build a cyberspace replica of Whitechapel, the London neighborhood stalked by the original Jack the Ripper in 1888.
2. He never met the person who hired him in the real world. They met only in cyberspace, where Hamilton's employer cloaked his identity under different guises, some male, some female.
3. As Hamilton became more and more suspicious, he devised a cyberspace weapon to protect himself, but—as his AI properly surmises—he was apparently murdered in the real world before he had a chance to use it. This weapon will kill the Ripper if used. He says it looks like a shuriken made of pure energy.
4. To keep the weapon secret, Hamilton divided it into three sections and hid each section in a different WELL. These WELLs are called Weapon One, Weapon Two, and Weapon Three.
5. The password to the Weapon One WELL is **Pegasus**. The password to the Weapon Two WELL is **Orestes**. The password to the Weapon Three WELL is **Odysseus**.
6. To put the weapon back together, you will need to travel to Virtual Whitechapel and acquire a software integrator. Mysteriously, Hamilton mentions that this might require having your fortune told once you get there.
7. Once the weapon is activated, it will only work once.
8. Once the weapon has been used, it will also cause Virtual Whitechapel to crash. You will be killed if you are caught in this crash, so you'll need to exit Whitechapel as soon as you use your weapon.

After Hamilton bids a touching good-bye to whom he believes is his brother, exit the Wofford WELL and deck to ...

WEAPON ONE WELL
(Password: Pegasus)

Battle the ICE that takes the form of a board game resembling chess. As in traditional chess, the idea is to capture your opponent's king. In this version, however, things are a bit different. To move pieces, click on the piece, then the square where you want it to relocate. Your pawns can only move one space in any direction until they take another piece, at which point they morph into another, more powerful creature. Until they morph, they cannot attack the opponent's ax men, but they can take other pawns and the king. After they morph, they can take the opponent's ax men. The archers can move two spaces in any direction, but only to take another piece. Once they do, they too will morph and become more powerful, at which point you can move them whenever you want. The King can move forward and from side to side, one space at a time. To win:

1. Get your pawns off the board as soon as possible, even if it means sacrificing them to your opponent. You can also move them off when you get on the second band of metallic grating; simply click on the side of the board and slide them off.
2. Prevent your opponent from getting his pawns off the table. Don't take them, and block them from getting to the grating on your side.
3. Once your pawns are off the board, the archers become more powerful. Your opponent will not be able to defeat them if he still has pawns on the board, and you will be able to easily take his king.

NOTE: The only real difference between difficulty levels is that the opponent becomes smarter from level to level. For

example, in the most difficult mode, your opponent will recognize the above strategy immediately and work to prevent it. In easier modes, it will not recognize it as quickly, and so you will be able to get your pawns off the board more quickly.

Exit the Weapon One WELL and deck to …

WEAPON TWO WELL
(Password: Orestes)

Battle the ICE that takes the form of a four-armed creature. Left-click to fire, right-click for shields. Hit the creature's eyes and—especially—the blue orb in the its forehead to win. Watch for your best opportunity to score when the creature leans in close to you (and you use your shield). When the creature pulls back, if it doesn't immediately move left or right, it will lean in again in exactly the same position. Position your cursor in anticipation of this and you will have a longer opportunity to score direct hits that should devastate your opponent. Win and you will be given the second piece of the weapon.

Exit the Weapon Two WELL and deck to …

WEAPON THREE WELL
(Password: Odysseus)

Defeat the ICE that resembles a rat by hitting it repeatedly in the eye and you will be able to retrieve the third piece of the weapon. Again, left-click to fire, right-click for shields.

Exit the Weapon Three WELL and deck to …

VIRTUAL HERALD WELL

Stop in and read the latest—your report on your friend Vic Farley's murder. Notice the dates on it and all the other Ripper slayings.

Exit the Virtual Herald WELL and deck to …

FALCONETTI'S WELL
(Password: Leather Apron)

Find the book that Gambit Nelson told you about by turning left twice.

Open the book and study the Ripper letter on the first page. Then, turn the pages (by using the grabbing hand icon on the side edge of each page) until you get to the section where a list of books on the left-hand side and blank spaces on the right. Use the Ripper letter to solve this puzzle. Each sentence of the letter correlates to a book title on the puzzle page. Drag the titles to the blank space on the right hand side, putting the titles in the corresponding order of the sentences. In order, the titles are:

1. **The VR-Living Complete Book of Home Repair (letter clue: "fix")**
2. **The Open Road: A History of 20th Century Auto Racing ("right track")**
3. **Epileptic Reactions to VR Environments ("fits")**
4. **The NEO New Age: Tearing Down the Myths ("slashing")**
5. **Earn Thousands as a VR Data Angel ("grand work")**
6. **The Duchess in the Clock Tower ("lady," "time")**
7. **Virtual Fly Fishing, Where There's Always a Hatch to Match ("catch")**
8. **Phoenix: Phact or Phiction? ("start again")**
9. **Short Excursions into VR Role Playing ("little games")**
10. **Topical Agents for the Treatment of Hemorrhaging ("red stuff," "went thick")**
11. **Deficit Spending in the Late 20th Century ("red ink")**
12. **Van Gogh: A Psychological Study (" clip ears")**
13. **Keeping Sharp: A Cutlery Collector's Bible ("knife is sharp")**
14. **Rabbi T.S. Foote: A Biography ("good luck")**

Once the puzzle is solved, the book will automatically give you an audio journal of the Web Runners' original Ripper game, the one in which Stephanie Jordan was killed. It will be automatically scanned into your WAC database.

View the next-to-last page of the book, which contains some human anatomy drawings, with red markings that seem to indicate cuts similar to those of Ripper victims.

Exit cyberspace and return to …

NEWSROOM

Access the audio file that you found in Falconetti's WELL. It will play an audio version of the original Web Runners' Ripper game in which Josie Dorsett was killed. Make sure you listen to the entire file.

Access the world map and travel to … .

SOAP BEATTY'S SMOKE SHOP

You find that Soap is suspicious of you now, too. Talk to him and learn that:

1. Soap is impressed to hear what Farley said before he died, and confirms that it's possible, in theory at least, to kill in cyberspace.
2. Soap suggests that it may have taken the Ripper a while to perfect his code.
3. Soap is unsure whether the Ripper is male or female, but he is sure of one thing: It would take a very

wealthy person to develop such a complex code.

4. The only person who may be able to tell you how to protect yourself in cyberspace is someone who goes by the cyberspace handle "Maximum Cain." You can find him at a WELL called "Digital Eden."
5. Soap can't analyze your handwriting samples until you get another sample to match them against.

Access the world map and go to …

META-COG

Go to the ICU. Talk to Dr. Bud Cable. He will be confused by some readings he's been getting from Catherine's brain—it has been showing some unusual bursts of activity for someone in a coma. Then:

1. Take advantage of Cable's offer to let you check his readings by going to the computer (click right once) and entering the dates of the Ripper murders; type them in on your keyboard. (Use the dates you found on the murder coverage you read in the Virtual Herald WELL—**11-19, 11-20, and 11-21**.) You will find that Catherine's bursts of brain activity correspond to the dates of the Ripper murders.
2. Ask Cable about your findings, and if he thinks it means Catherine is able to interface with an outside system; Cable will doubt this is possible.

If you're in scenario 2: Ask Cable what he thinks of the picture Falconetti gave you that shows Magnotta as the Ripper. He'll tell you if anyone could retrieve such an image, it would be Falconetti. He'll add that it looks authentic to him.

If you're in scenario 3: Ask Cable what he thinks of the picture Magnotta gave you that shows Falconetti as the Ripper. He'll tell you it looks authentic

Use the ICU computer to deck into Catherine's mind and enter her inner sanctum.

Talk to Catherine, keeping your statements and questions in the following order, and she will become more aware as you speak to her and will eventually gain the ability to answer you.

1. Tell her that Magnotta, Falconetti and Burton all played the Web Runners' game based on the original Jack the Ripper murders, and that the last time they played, someone was killed.
2. Ask her about Burton's secret lab project.
3. Ask her why she didn't tell you she was close to the Ripper.
4. Ask her who Josie Dorsett was.
5. Ask her how she was attacked.

If you're in scenario 4: Ask Catherine if the Ripper is still after her.

Once you're asked all the questions in the proper order, you'll learn that:

1. Catherine didn't love you and was out to scoop you on the Ripper story. In fact, she'd actually cut a deal to break the story in a competitive newspaper.
2. Josie Dorsett was Catherine's mother.
3. You need to track down George Rhodes of the PanFinancial Bank to learn more about Burton's secret project.
4. Catherine was attacked when she responded to an anonymous tip about a book in the Virtual Library—a book about the original Jack the Ripper. The last thing she remembers is picking it up.

If you're in scenario 4: Catherine will tell you that she thinks the Ripper is still after her and she doesn't want to end up like Farley. Ask her how she knows about Farley when she's in a closed system.

Exit cyberspace.

Access the world map and travel to …

PANFINANCIAL

Talk to George Rhodes, who is standing behind at the main counter. He'll reveal that the information he had for Catherine is in safety-deposit box **#759.**

Go left once and view the doorway to the vault of safety-deposit boxes. Go into the room and find safety-deposit box #759.

Go to the box and access your WAC notebook. Examine the entry on Rhodes that you made note of earlier when you were examining Catherine's electronic Rolodex. Note the numbers on the entry: **185621**. This is the combination to the safe-deposit box.

Look at safety-deposit box #759. Enter the combination 185621 on the keypad of the box, then click on "Enter."

Once the box is open, you find an electronic ledger. Scan the contents into your WAC database. Examine it in your database to see the password to the Berman WELL. The password is **Berman4.**

Note that the rest of the document seems to show large amounts of cash being transferred from an account listed as "Berman Ltd." to an account listed as "Simian Technologies."

Access the world map and go to … .

NEWSROOM

Go to your desk and use your computer to enter

cyberspace. Deck to …

BERMAN WELL
(Password: Berman4)
You are confronted by ICE in the form of a moving concentration puzzle. Click on a panel and it will flip over to reveal a standard UPC label, with numbers at the bottom. You need to uncover two more tiles that match. In the more difficult levels, the tiles will move with each click, before you can make a second or third selection , so you must anticipate where you think the tile you want will move. Best to start off in easy mode, where the tiles will not shift until you have made three selections. **To win in easy mode, click on the first tile in the top row, then the first tile in the third row, then the third tile in the last row.** In the more difficult levels, the tiles will shift in varying patterns that are randomly loaded, so there is no set solution. You should note, however, that there are only three tiles on the board that you can match (i.e., only one set of matching numbers is hidden). Therefore, in order to have a chance to win, the first tile you need to uncover should have the following number on it: **3411700863**.

Find the "Simian Tech" ledger and read the documents therein. The first item in the ledger details the document you found in the PanFinancial safety deposit box. It reveals that the large sums of cash you saw listed on that earlier document were apparently spent on the purchase of code that somehow represented things like "organ failure," "terminal images," and "moment of death." (**NOTE:** For some reason, the art for the signatures does not appear here, although there are spaces for them. When you exit cyberspace later, look at this document again in your WAC database and the signatures will appear. You will need these signatures when you go to Soap Beatty later and ask him to analyze the handwriting.)

If you're in scenarios 2, 3, or 4: Read the next page, but it will reveal nothing that implicates any of your suspects.

If you're in scenario 1: Read the next page to learn that the Berman account is owned by Vigo Haman.

Leave the Berman WELL and deck to …

MAXIMUM CAIN'S WELL
(Password: Digital Eden)
When you arrive, you find that Maximum Cain has been told to expect you by Soap Beatty. Talk to Cain to learn that:

1. You'll need three things to beat the Ripper in cyberspace: a sensor program to alert you to any impending attacks; an anti-viral code to destroy anything detected by the sensor; and a compression program to load these things on your system.
2. You can get a sensor program at the Isis WELL. The password is **Psy Bard.**
3. Cain has a compression program and is willing to give it to you immediately, which he does.
4. Cain can get you an anti-viral program, but it's going to take him a while; you'll have to come back later.

Deck to … .

ISIS WELL
(Password: Psy Bard)
You are confronted by ICE in the form of a puzzle involving hieroglyphs. The central panel contains encoded clues that you need to solve the puzzle. To win, you must decode the center panel of clues. As the Sphinx's voice tells you, "For you, the vulture may be the beginning." In this case, it is—the beginning of the alphabet. The vulture represents the letter "A." Count through the alphabet from there, working clockwise and ignoring the glyphs in the corners. Once you have decoded all the words in the center panel, you will have five words or phrases that describe one of the glyphs. The five words or phrases and each glyph they describe are:

1. SHELTER — "H"
2. NOOSE — "O"
3. MOUTH — "R"
4. QUAIL — "U"
5. FOLDED CLOTH — "S"

The five letters thus gained spell the word **Horus.** Click on the glyphs that fall in the numerical place of the letters H, O, R, U, and S. As you do so, each ideograph (glyph) you select will appear in the blank squares at the bottom of the panel. When you properly spell Horus, you will automatically be given the sensor program.

Deck back to …

CAIN'S WELL
(Password: Digital Eden)
Talk to Cain to learn that he has located an anti-viral utility. It is located at the Anti-Viral WELL, and the password is **Exterminator.**

Deck to ….

ANTI-VIRAL WELL
(Password: Exterminator)
You'll see your data angel as a figure on a raised field of flipping red and green tiles. To win, you must cross the

board to any tile in the last row. By clicking on a tile immediately adjacent to you in any direction, you'll be able to jump to that tile, as long as it is either red or green. Jumping to a tile will cause surrounding tiles to flip. If it flips to a tile that is blank, you cannot jump to it. Over time, all of the tiles will change to black, with a skull and crossbones emblazoned on them. If these tiles block you from getting to the last row, or if the tile you are standing on turns to the skull and crossbones, you will lose.

To win at any level of difficulty: The winning path across the board is the same at all three levels of difficulty. The only difference between the levels is the speed at which the tiles flip to the skull and crossbones—the harder the level, the faster you must jump. To win, simply follow the following path:

1. Left	7. Forward	13. Forward
2. Forward	8. Right	14. Right
3. Left	9. Right	15. Left
4. Forward	10. Right	16. Right
5. Forward	11. Forward	17. Forward
6. Left	12. Back	18. Forward

When you have successfully crossed the field of flipping tiles, you will automatically be given the anti-viral utility; it will be placed in your WAC database.

Exit cyberspace.

Access the world map and go to …

NEWSROOM

In your WAC database, view the documents you copied in the Berman WELL. Note the signatures. (**NOTE:** The signatures do not appear when you look at the document in the Berman WELL.)

Access the world map and go to …

SOAP BEATTY'S SMOKE SHOP

Now that you have the documents you uncovered in the Berman WELL, you can ask Soap to analyze the signatures and compare them to the handwriting samples you've already collected from Magnotta, and Burton.

Soap analyzes the signatures and concludes that the signatures on the Berman document that supposedly belong to the corporate officers of Simian Technologies match the handwriting sample you took from Clare Burton.

If you're in scenario 2, 3 or 4: Access the world map and skip ahead to the Cafe Duchamp.

If you're in scenario 1: Access the world map and go to …

POLICE STATION

Talk to Lou Brannon and ask him about Vigo Haman. He'll tell you who he is, what he looks like, and where to find him.

Go to Magnotta's office and tell him you know more about Burton's secret project.

Access the world map and travel to …

CAFE DUCHAMP

Talk to Gambit Nelson and ask him:

1. If he knows anything about the Web Runners.
2. If he knows anything about the Web Runners' Ripper game. Take note when he mentions the Warp Space WELL and its password: **Warp.**
3. If Falconetti ever played the game.

If you're in scenario 1 or 4: Go to Vigo Haman's table in the back of the cafe and talk to him.

As soon as you begin to talk to Vigo Haman, he will tell you that an investigative piece you once wrote uncovered one of his operations and cost him money. He's wanted to get you back ever since. He will also tell you that you'd better not write about him or he'll ruin your friend and boss, Ben Dodds—he claims to have proof that Ben once covered up the falsehoods in a story written by his daughter that resulted in an innocent person's death. Once he has established these parameters, however, he will answer some questions.

If you're in scenario 1: You will be able to ask Haman about his connection to Berman, Inc. Starting with this question, proceed with the following steps in this order:

1. Confront Haman with your knowledge of his ownership of Berman, Inc. He'll admit it.
2. Ask him if he knows Dr. Burton. Tell him you know he does.
3. Reveal that you know about Burton's experiments with monkeys. He'll threaten to kill you if you go public.
4. Tell him you don't care about him, you're only concerned with the Ripper. He'll explain his connection to Burton.

If you're in scenario 4: You'll be able to ask Haman if he knows who the Ripper is, bluff him with a lie, or accuse him outright of being involved with the Ripper. Start by asking for his help with identifying the Ripper:

1. Tell him you think he's involved with the Ripper. He'll deny it until you tell him you have evidence.
2. Next, lay out the evidence concerning the fingerprints on the knife used in the attempted

murder of Covington Wofford. Haman will admit he hired the hit man, that he did so at the behest of someone who contacted him anonymously in cyberspace, and that if he'd known it was the Ripper, he would have refused the job.

Access the world map and travel to …

NEWSROOM

Go to your desk and use your decking port to deck to …

WARP SPACE WELL

(Password: Warp)

Activate the monitor by clicking on the screen. It's not clear what this screen represents, although it seems to have something to do with not only the source code for the Ripper role-playing game, but the Web Runners who played it—Burton, Falconetti, and Josie Dorsett are listed with their c-space handles. However, the other people you've already learned in the audio tape were the Web Runners who played the Ripper game—namely, the Ripper's victims, Mendler, Estevez, Stein, and Jordan—are not listed, while numerous new names are given. **The non-Web Runner names listed are not clues and you should ignore them.** Likewise, the various c-space handles are confusing, too; while you'll note that Burton, Falconetti, and Dorsett all have Victorian handles appropriate to the period of the original Ripper, the other names do not, and seem to reflect exclusive inside gags by the game makers. **Ignore the non-Victorian c-space handles, too; they are not clues.** Thus, if the c-space handle "Blademan" seems an obvious clue, making you think you need to hunt down "acooper," whom you've never heard of before, you'd be mistaken. The real clues hidden in this strange screen are:

That the fatal Ripper game took place on Dec. 23.

If you're in scenario 3: One day before the fatal game, someone going under the c-space handle "Clarence" accessed the source code. Clarence's true identity is listed as "unknown."

If you're in scenario 2: One day before the fatal game, someone going under the c-space handle Jack Rip" accessed the source code. "Jack Rip's true identity is listed as "unknown."

If you're in scenario 3: You are now on a quest for the person listed as "Clarence," who may have introduced some element into the source code of the Ripper game that led to the death of Josie Dorsett—the first of the Ripper's killings via cyberspace.

If you're in scenario 2: You are now on a quest for the person listed as "Jack Rip," who may have introduced some element into the source code of the Ripper game that led to the death of Josie Dorsett—the first of the Ripper's killings via cyberspace.

Exit cyberspace and return to …

NEWSROOM

Access the world map and travel to …

META-COG

Go to Clare Burton's office and talk to her. Ask her the following questions in this order:

1. What happened during the Web Runners' Ripper game in which Josie Dorsett was killed?
2. Why would anyone want to kill Josie Dorsett?
3. If she thinks the person who killed Josie Dorsett is the Ripper?
4. Who she thinks that person is?
5. About her secret lab.
6. How Catherine could have survived if the Ripper is killing from cyberspace?
7. **If you're in scenario 2:** Ask Burton what she thinks of the picture that Falconetti gave you of Magnotta as the Ripper.
8. **If you're in scenario 3:** Ask Burton what she thinks of the picture that Magnotta gave you of Falconetti as the Ripper.

Once you've asked all the questions in order, you will have learned that:

1. Burton claims that Ben Dodds is collaborating with her on her secret project, and that the project is controlled by the PanFinancial Bank.
2. Burton admits her research has resulted in a process that could kill through cyberspace.
3. Burton switched roles with Josie Dorsett on the day Dorsett was killed. This could mean that the killer was after Burton, not Dorsett.
4. Burton believes the killer was either Magnotta or Falconetti.

If you're in scenario 2: When you present Burton with the Ripper picture given to you by Falconetti, Burton will deny that he had the ability to retrieve such an image. She will suggest that you find out if there is a photo processor of some sort at the Virtual Herald.

If you're in scenario 3: When you present her with the Ripper picture given to you by Magnotta, Burton will deny that he had the ability to retrieve such an image. She

will suggest that you find out if there is a photo processor of some sort at the Virtual Herald.

If you're in scenario 1, 3, or 4: Go to ICU and speak to Dr. Cable. He will urge you to continue working on Catherine's memory. Deck into Catherine's mind and try to rebuild her memory by asking her who "Clarence" is. She'll say she's not sure but that it might be Magnotta, who was a much better decker than he lets on … meaning he probably knows much more about programming—and altering code—than he lets on.

Exit cyberspace.

Access the world map and go to …

NEWSROOM

Talk to Ben Dodds and:

1. Ask him if he's working on a story with Clare Burton; he'll admit it, but add that he's not sure she's giving him all the facts.
2. Ask him if there's an audio-video editor (called a photo processor in all other dialogue) available.

If you're in scenario 1 or 4: Warn Dodds that Vigo Haman says he has something on him. Ben will tell you that Haman's story is accurate, but you should go ahead and run the story anyway.

If you're in scenario 2 or 3: Get the photo processor (it's on the center desk by the window) and scan it into your WAC database. In your database, use it to examine the picture of the Ripper (by pressing the "analyze" button on the bottom of the picture). You discover that the picture is a fake.

Access the world map and go to …

POLICE STATION

Talk to Magnotta and tell him that you know about the death during the Web Runners' Ripper game.

If you're in scenario 3: Tell Magnotta that you've proven the picture he gave you—the one showing Falconetti as the Ripper—is a fake. He will get angry but relent and release Falconetti.

If you're in scenario 1: Press Magnotta about Burton's secret project. He'll tell you he's investigating it and you should stay out of it.

Access the world map and go to …

FALCONETTI'S SAFEHOUSE

Go past Twig into the back room. Talk to Falconetti and find out that:

1. He feels that Magnotta framed him for the Dorsett murder fifteen years ago and he's bitter about the two years he spent in prison waiting for his lawyers to get the evidence thrown out. Falconetti believes Magnotta framed him in order to break up his marriage to Burton. It apparently worked—he says Burton divorced him without warning while he was still in prison.
2. He thinks Magnotta actually murdered Dorsett.
3. He barely knew Dorsett, but says Burton was fairly close to her.
4. He, too, has an injured shoulder, and says he hurt it throwing knives.

If you're in scenario 2: Tell Falconetti that you've proven that the picture he gave you—the one showing Magnotta as the Ripper—is a fake. He will claim that he was just trying to rile Magnotta.

If you're in scenario 3: Tell Falconetti that you've proven the picture Magnotta gave you—the one that shows Falconetti as the Ripper—is a fake. Falconetti will be grateful to you for clearing him on that account.

Access the world map and go to any location. As soon as you arrive, you will receive a WAC message from Dr. Bud Cable. He will tell you that the image of the Ripper has improved dramatically and you better get over there.

Access the world map and travel to …

META-COG

Go to the ICU, where you find that the image of the Ripper has mysteriously disappeared. Cable can't explain it. Then the Ripper's voice and image will emanate from every monitor in the room, and he tells you to deck to the Virtual Library and pick up the book you'd examined earlier.

Use the ICU deck port to deck to …

VIRTUAL LIBRARY

You will automatically pick up the Ripper's book and be transported to … .

VIRTUAL WHITECHAPEL

You arrive and are confronted by a fortune-telling machine. It will automatically present you with several tarot cards which you need to place in a certain order. The trick is to match the cards to the words of the song playing in the background. In particular, "Seasons don't fear the reaper, nor do the wind and the sun and the rain." Clicking on the cards will bring up the names of the particular card, pronounced backwards. The image on the cards is also appropriate to their names—the one with the picture of the grim reaper, for example, is the "Reaper" card.

Place the cards in this order:

1. "Seasons"
2. "Fear"
3. "Reaper"
4. "Wind"
5. "Sun"
6. "Rain"

Place the cards in the proper order and you will see your weapon assemble and join with your data angel. Then you will automatically be shown images of all the suspects—Magnotta, Burton, Falconetti, and Catherine Powell—dressed in Victorian garb, as you stalk the streets of Whitechapel looking for the Ripper. You will automatically walk to a ring in the center of virtual Whitechapel, where you will be confronted by the suspects one at a time. Just before they appear, you will see the weapon given to you by Hamilton Wofford floating in the middle of the screen. It will look like a glowing orb, and it will become your mouse icon. When you see the suspect you believe is the Ripper, click on him or her with the orb weapon.

If you're in scenario 1, Dr. Clare Burton is the Ripper.
If you're in scenario 2, Joey Falconetti is the Ripper.
If you're in scenario 3, Detective Vincent Magnotta is the Ripper.
If you're in scenario 4, Catherine Powell is the Ripper.

If you've made the right choice, you will be shown a cinematic epilogue explaining the rest of the story. Congratulations.

APPENDIX

CHEAT CODES

TO skip through a particular puzzle or combat as if you've won it, type the following word at any point after the event has begun.

Biologic ICE (entering Catherine's brain)
"CAFFEINE"

Spider Sliding Tile Puzzle (entering Web Runners' WELL)
"ZZTOP"

Stained Glass Tile Puzzle (entering Falconetti's Secret WELL)
"HEADACHE"

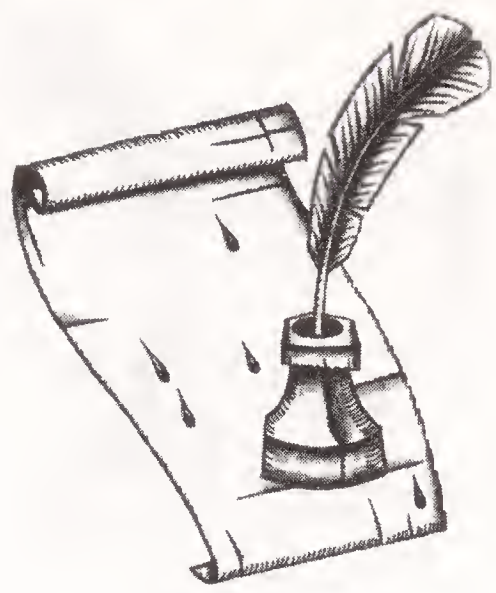
Chess Game (Weapon One WELL)
"ASPIRIN"

Falconetti's Secret WELL Book Puzzle
"SPONGE"

Jumping Guy Puzzle (entering Anti-Viral WELL)
"PRETZEL"

All Other Combats
"ARCADE"

Notes



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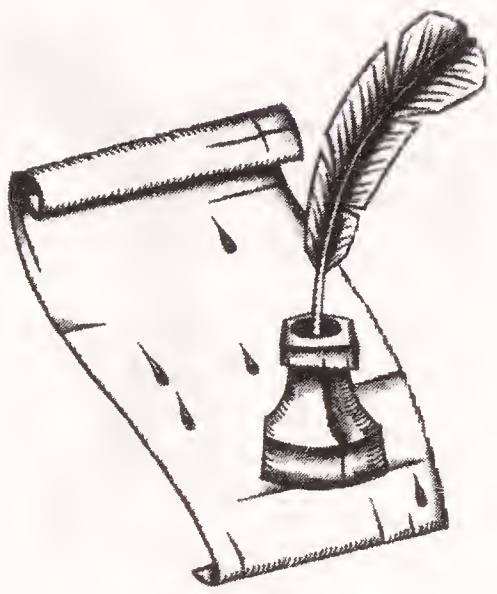

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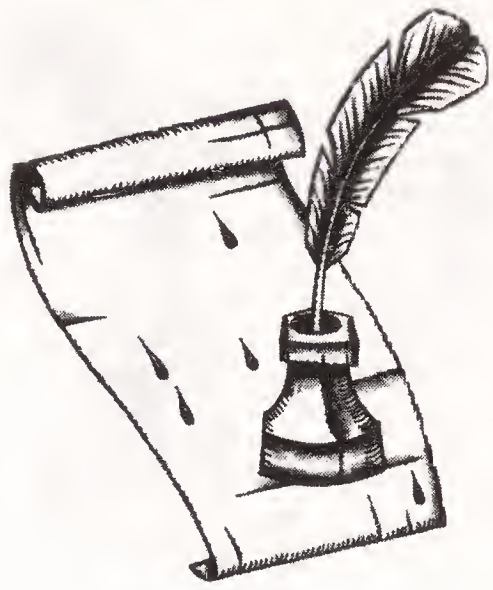

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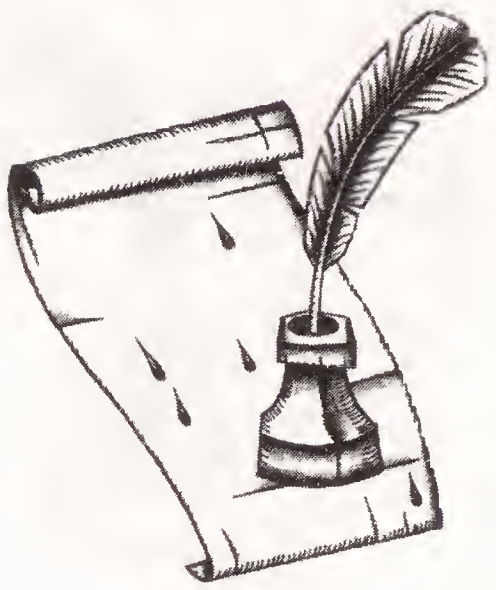

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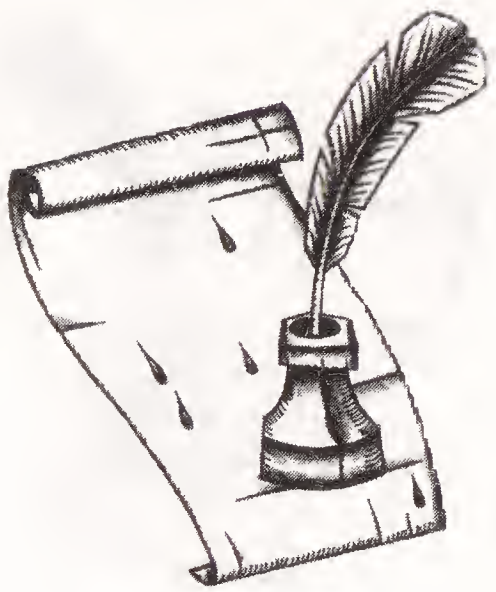

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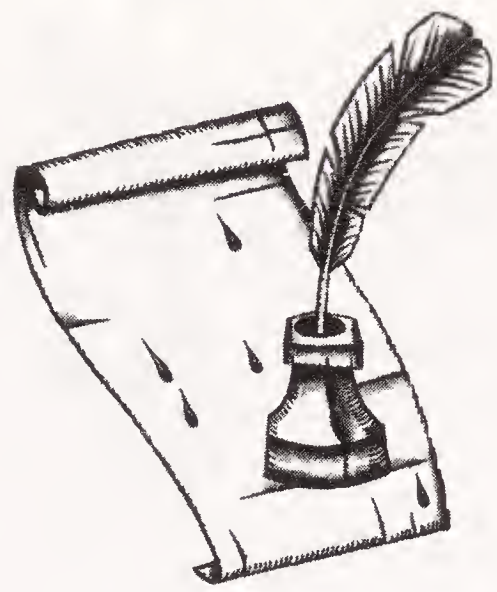

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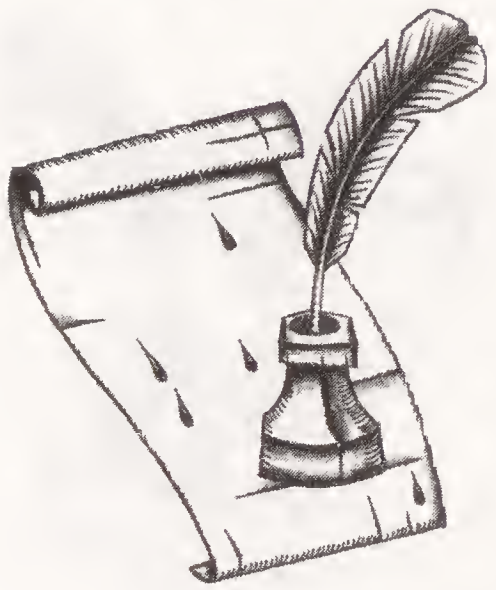
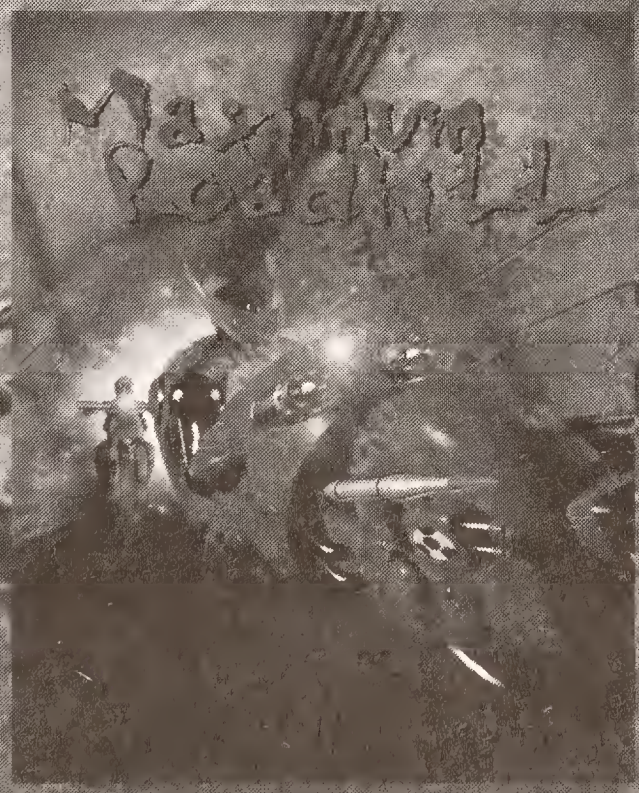
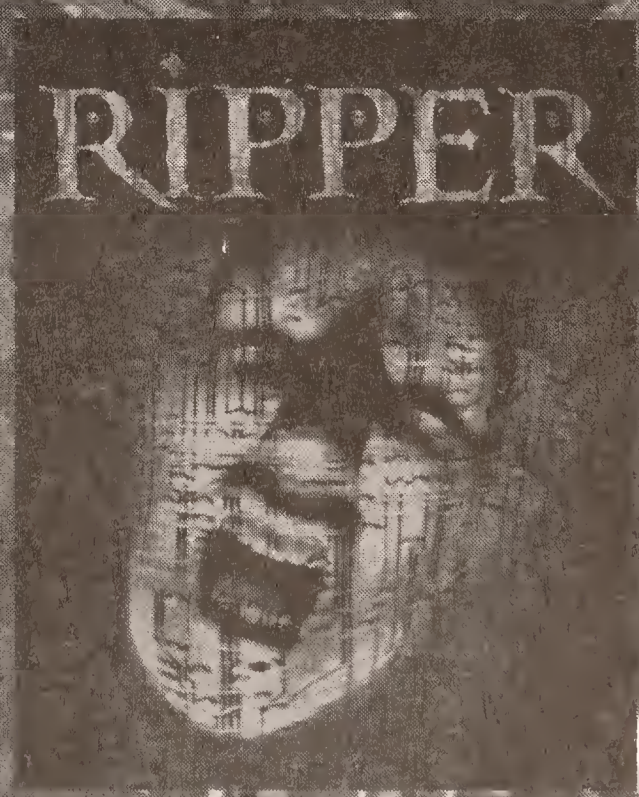


CHECK OUT THESE OTHER EXCITING TITLES FROM TAKE 2.





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